THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

ARCH, 1960

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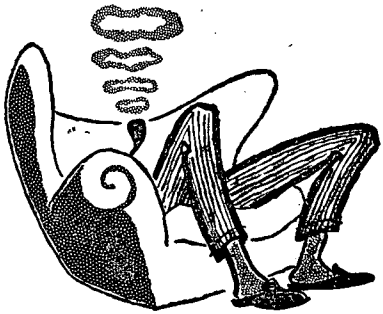

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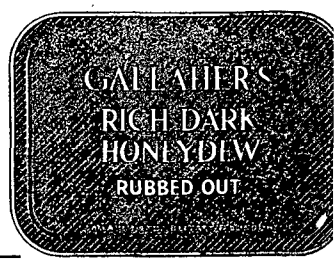

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Log Book

MANY a scenario writer, hopefully scanning best-sellers in search of plots for new musical films, might do well to turn his attention to the personal columns of daily newspapers.

Bless us, an average week of the Agonies could supply material for *The King and I* several times over—with national snake-charming competitions in South Ken, requests for genuine ex-royal crowns, disengaged couples disposing of tigerskin rugs, demands for bearded men who are prepared to keep shaving and re-bearding, inquiries into the psychology of donkeys, offers of Arab robes and Scottish evening full-dress regalia—but enough, let's whip up our own scenario!

Nick Lochinvar, a young Scot, is broke and broken-hearted. Owing to a revolution he has had to leave the independent Indian kingdom of Pawncore, where he was agent-general, and Kate, the girl he adored, has stayed behind to look after the little prince Ali, and, moreover, is engaged to Nick's rival, Monkhouse.

Nick is reduced to selling either his dress kilt with velvet sporran, or Amanda, his faithful mamba. (Yes yes, we know you don't get mambas in India but he had been in Africa first.)

Baritone solo: *Hiss me tender, hiss me true,*
No one's left to me but you,
No one else is worth my while
A hiss is better than a smile.

Scanning the Agonies for his kilt advertisement he sees the snake-charming competition notice, prize £5,000. Five thousand would put Firuz Khan back on the throne, and Nick at once hitch-hikes to South Kensington, taking Amanda in a duffel bag.

The other competitors are already assembled, elderly ladies

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with their boas, Pathans with pythons, motorists with windscreen vipers. The contest begins, to a toot of flutes and a ballet of nautch girls and swaying serpents:

I'm under your sway
By the tune that you croon in the rainy monsoon
I am carried away.

Amanda wins at a canter, naturally. But who does Nick see, charming an elderly cobra? Why, it is the treacherous vizier, Abdulla, who made off with the Lownarka, Pawncore's sacred crown of rubies, for which King Firuz has been advertising.

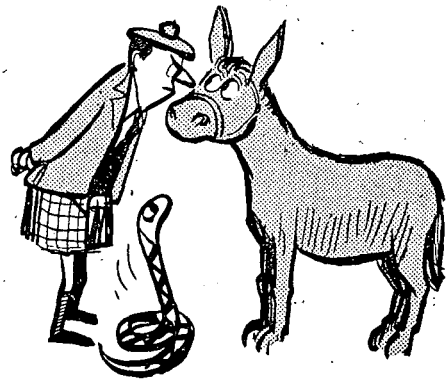
Nick, with Amanda's help, overpowers Abdulla and the cobra, regains the rubies, grows a beard to impersonate the King until all danger is past, and rejects the advances of the sinuous Anna Kondah, revolutionary spy. She avenges herself by telling him Kate is married. In a mood of black despair, he turns to studying the psychology of donkeys.

One day, scanning the Agony columns for the code go-ahead signal from Firuz, he sees with joy that Kate's engagement is at an end and that she is selling the hateful tigerskin on which Monkhouse proposed to her.

Back to Pawncore Nick dashes, where Kate is waiting:

I've a bungalow deep in the jungle-o
For my lover turned out to be false,
Though he swore that one day he would fetch me away
As we whirled in the windowbox waltz.
But he left me a wallflower from that day to this
And I sit in the jungle and hear the snakes hiss—

And who is the hisser but the faithful Amanda, just in time to rescue Kate and the little prince from a murder attempt by Anna Kondah and to lead them to Nick.



Firuz is restored, and the final close-up shows Amanda twined round the loving couple. With a bow to Kipling, we leave the colourful shores of Pawncore. Title? *Hiss Me, Kate*, would do . . .

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In Argosy this month: We're glad to welcome **Michael Gilbert** and Detective Inspector Petrella back to our pages. Michael Gilbert's play, *A Clean Kill*, is now running in London and has had applauding reviews.

Peter Scott, famous naturalist and painter of birds, has just written his first short story—*Nature of Fear* on page 37—and we are proud to introduce it. More about the author on page 52.

Strange Nocturne is an impressive new story by **Rhys Davies** whose work, whether haunting or hilarious, has a rich timbre unmistakably his own. Recent book titles for Rhys Davies enthusiasts: *The Perishable Quality, The Darling of her Heart.*

Borden Deal's first novel, *Walk Through the Valley*, won him wide acclaim and his second, *Dunbar's Cove*, brought him a Guggenheim Fellowship and Book Society Recommendation. He lives in America, has a toughish, bearded appearance, and writes prolifically—mainly about life in America's rich, deep, corn-pone-crusted Southland.

Connell Bernard, when pressed for biographical information, sent us such a delightful poem that we are printing it on page 103.

Alan C. Hemus tells us that he earns a precarious living writing stories for boys' magazines, is addicted to mountaineering, and often visits Norway, where his story is set.

JOHN SILVER

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DIABLO

He put the knife in his belt and reached both hands to the rope

BY VICTOR FRANCIS

I FOUND him on the beach in the early morning, in that hour when the light is like a rose-pearl and the stilled waters of the lagoon breathe rather than break on the sand.

And on this Saturday morning, I was wondering with no more perturbation than usual which would happen first—the collapse of my Mission church for lack of money to repair it, or the arrival of an unlikely grant or bequest from back home. But I knew that long before my walk was ended I should, as usual, have ceased to worry, in the sure knowledge that we are all in the care of Providence.

And then, as I turned past the last fat palm bole, I saw the sprawling figure, crumpled a dozen feet from the water near the centre of the beach's golden crescent.

I did not run to him—after twenty years at the Mission, the slow tempo of island life had become mine—but I walked as fast as the sand and my flapping cassock would allow.

He raised his head at my approach and, before I was close enough to make out his features, I sensed rather than saw that his eyes were fixed hard on mine.

I came very close.

He did not move except to tilt his head to keep me in focus, and he said, "A Holy Joe! A Holy screamin' Joe! Now, ain't that great!"

He was leaning on one elbow, his body curled, and I was bending down to see if he was hurt when suddenly I stopped.

The hand shielded by his body was holding a revolver. It was black and looked heavy, and the muzzle pointed directly at me—just where the third button of my cassock would have been if I had remembered to ask Juanita to sew it on.

We stared at each other in silence for a moment—he grinning, the gun pointing, and I blinking a little because I am short-sighted now and should have taken my spectacles.

He said, "Don't look so surprised, Dad. Even you must know what this is."

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He waved the black gun.

I said firmly, "Young man, I know very well what it is: an English Webley of a model that has changed little since the first world war. Until I was called to minister to the islanders here, I was chaplain to a number of organisations which included an admirable Target Club. I always found the Webley a little heavy, but I suspect that I can fire it rather more accurately than you. Please put it away. You do not impress me, and you have no need of it here."

"Well, I'll be—" he said, and tucked the gun in his belt and rose to his feet.

He did not exactly rise; he uncurled and levered himself up, and then swayed so severely that I had to catch him to prevent him falling.

I saved his balance, and I felt the muscles of his arms tense.

His eyes hardened and he grunted, "Don't think I can't take care of myself, Dad," and he pulled out that heavy Webley again.

"It's evident that you can," I answered ruefully, "but even so you need to eat. If you care to follow me up to the Mission I will gladly give you breakfast. If you prefer to stay here with your gun that is your own affair. I am going to eat."

I turned on my heel and walked back up the beach with as much dignity as I could muster, bearing in mind my short sight, the lack of a button on my cassock, and the fact that more sand was entering than leaving my sandals.

For perhaps fifteen paces I heard him stumbling after me, but gradually his steps slowed.

I did not turn my head. Then his footsteps stopped. As I walked on, there was a crumpling sound.

When I turned he was stretched on the sand, out cold, the Webley still in his hand. I picked him up, slung him across my shoulders like a sack, and made my way very slowly up the path back to the Mission.

I was panting heavily when I reached the bungalow but feeling pleased with myself for Juanita was always telling me that I was getting fat in my middle age. "Muscle, my dear child, all solid muscle," I used to reply. And it was encouraging if a little surprising to find my words more or less true.

I slumped the man in a chair and busied myself for half an hour.

When I returned with his breakfast he was struggling back to consciousness and muttering to himself.

The only words I could catch were so foul that I wished I had not heard them.

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He jerked spasmodically twice as if in a nightmare from which he was trying to escape, and suddenly, simultaneously, his eyes were open and his right hand at his belt.

" Don't worry," I said gently, " your gun is still there. But, more important, so is your breakfast." And I gestured towards the tray with its fruit, its milk, home-baked bread, and cold fish fresh from the lagoon.

He ate with a wolfishness the like of which I had not seen since the first relief ship had reached the islands in the wake of the great typhoon.

As he ate he grunted, crumbs clinging to his chin, " How far's the village? "

" There is no village on this island."

" No village? Where the hell does everyone live? "

" On the other islands. The nearest—you cannot see it except from the point—is about six miles off."

" Well, what are you doin' here on your own? Are you on the run, too? A Holy Joe on the run! "

He laughed with far more enthusiasm than I thought the joke warranted, so I explained rather severely, " When I first came to this Mission there were about sixty families on the island. They were good people and it was not difficult to love them. Then we were struck by a typhoon. More than half these families were wiped out. The rest lost their crops, their homes, their livestock."

" What am I supposed to do? Weep? "

" You asked me, and I shall tell you. Because of the position of the Mission here, we missed the full force of the typhoon. My church and my home were damaged but not destroyed. The islanders looked upon it as a miracle—"

" Yes, and I can just see you cashin' in on it."

" The islanders regard the church as even more holy than hitherto. So when the survivors of the storm left to start again on the neighbouring islands, I stayed here. When I am needed they come for me. And every Sunday they come paddling in their fine boats across the water and into the lagoon, returning to worship at our church."

" And there's no one else on the whole island? "

" No one. Except my children."

" Your—? " He broke into another burst of laughter.

I interrupted him, " My adopted children. Their parents worked for me. Both were killed in the storm. I have brought up the son and daughter ever since."

He looked up suspiciously.

" Where are the kids? "

" Today is Saturday. In the centre of the island is a clearing

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wherein lie those who died in the storm. Every Saturday Robert and Juanita go up to tend it. They will be back soon."

The man leaned back in his chair and belched loudly.

I studied him sadly. He could not have been more than twenty-four or twenty-five, but viciousness and the sun had moulded and set his face. His fingers were thick, the nails splintered, the skin like leather. I knew where a man got hands like those.

"I suppose you have escaped from Diablo?"

He started, and then sat back and laughed again. "It's not hard to guess at that. Where else?"

Diablo, the Devil's Island, inhabited solely by convicted murderers since the government announced its five-year experiment of abolishing the death penalty. Diablo, hundreds of miles away!

"You must be a very good seaman," I said.

"Me? You should see me! But I came out with a guy who was. Then he got sick and died. Guess that's how I came to wreck the boat, me on my own at night and that."

"It was fortunate that your friend brought you within swimming distance of the islands."

"Wasn't it just? You didn't think I'd sailed this far on my own, did you?"

"No. You see, I found your friend's body on the beach last night—washed up near the spot where I found you. I buried him myself behind the Mission. It is a nameless grave. That is a sad thing. Perhaps you would tell me who your friend was, and Robert can carve his name on a cross."

"He's dead, ain't he? What's it matter?"

I had been filling my pipe. As I began to light it, I said slowly through the sweet smoke, "It matters a lot. I told you that I found the body. The knife was still in his back."

I was tired with a great sadness rather than physical fatigue as I sat rocking in my chair and sucking at my now empty pipe. I had lived too long to be naïve. But perhaps I had lived too long on the islands; loving the islanders, trusting their trust I had forgotten the face of evil until I had seen it behind the brown mask of the man with the Webley.

Long into the afternoon we talked. He listened and he laughed He strode through the bungalow, flinging aside my possessions and the children's as he hunted for liquor that I told him was no there. And he laughed louder when he found a flagon of wine

Now he was sitting on the steps of the bungalow porch his back to me, drinking the wine, muttering to himself.

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I heard laughter from behind the Mission, running feet, the children's voices; and suddenly Juanita came racing into the clearing. She carried a flower in her hand. Her long black hair was tossed forward over her face, and her young breasts swung against her homemade cotton dress with the swift movement of her body.

Behind her ran Robert—fourteen, and a year younger than his sister—he almost bumped into her as she suddenly halted, seeing the man on the steps.

She looked at me questioningly, but before I could speak the man rose, the bottle swinging from his hand.

"Say," he slurred, moving towards the girl, "I thought you said they was kids. You didn't tell me there was a woman here. I haven't had a woman for three years."

He lurched nearer to her, and Juanita stood motionless, a half smile on her lips, in her eyes no premonition of danger. I got to my feet and cried loudly, "I forbid you to touch that child."

At my voice Juanita's hand went to her mouth. Her gaze turned from the man to me and back, as the first finger of fear touched her.

The man spun round to me. "You've had her too long," he shouted. "It's my turn now." And he hurled the wine flagon at my head.

His aim was bad, and in any case I was already down the steps and halfway to him. Juanita ducked quickly round him and ran to my side.

He stood swaying, his head lowered, and I put my hand on Juanita's shoulder. Then the man grinned and he pulled the gun from his belt. He said, "I'm havin' that girl, Dad, and if it's over your dead body it's just too bad, but I'm havin' her."

He was walking towards us. I said, "You cannot frighten me, and you will not harm this child."

"I'm havin' her." Still grinning, his thumb eased back the hammer of the revolver.

He was almost on us now, and I pushed Juanita behind me.

"I'm havin' her. I told you." He raised the gun and aimed it at me. I looked into his eyes and saw nothing that I knew or to which I could speak.

Suddenly he jammed the gun against my stomach and squeezed the trigger. The click of the hammer striking the empty chamber was barely audible.

"I removed the bullets when you were asleep," I said quietly.

I could feel his breath on my face, and I stepped back and said to Juanita, "Into the house—quickly!"

There was a curse and I was pushed violently aside as the man's

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arm lunged for the girl. There was the sound of cotton ripping; her wild scream; and I was trying to find my feet. And then the olive flash as Robert hurled himself at the man.

Before I could get to them, the man had shaken off the slight body of the boy. An arm rose, the black gun glinted in the sunlight, and it crashed down.

Robert crumpled from his grip; and as I moved to catch the limp body the man sobbed, " Jeez, a kid. What am I doin' killin' a kid? "

He weighed the bloodied gun in his hand, then hurled it far into the trees and stumbled away.

The only sound was the wind-rustle in the palm fronds as they whispered in the lacquering moonlight; the buzz and bustle of the night insects, and the rhythmic *clap-clap* of the bell rope as it swung against the wall of the Mission tower.

We had dressed Robert's wounds with the little skill I had learnt and the intuitive knowledge Juanita had been born with. Now the herbs and his youth must do their work; it was out of our hands. We had moved his bed into the living-room because it was bigger, and Juanita and I sat by him—both of us silent, knowing that our thoughts were the same prayers.

We had not eaten, though the night was half gone. Once Juanita asked softly, " Will he come back? "

I answered, " He must, child. There is nowhere else on the island for him to go. But you will be safe, I promise you."

Juanita heard the footsteps first, and gave a little gasp. I put my hand on hers and then I heard, too. They came closer, slowly, and then they thumped up the steps and he was in the doorway, looking down at us.

" How's the kid? " he said.

" The boy will live, I pray."

" Good. I musta been out of my mind, brainin' a kid like that. Just a kid." His eyes turned to Juanita. " But it was in a good cause."

" Do not disturb the boy," I said. " Come outside and listen to me. Juanita, stay where you are."

We walked out on to the porch.

I sat in my rocking chair and he leaned against the post as I said, " Have you, I wonder, thought about the situation? I have."

" So? "

" You cannot stay on this island indefinitely. A party from Diablo is bound to search here before long. You cannot leave without a boat—and there is no boat until the islanders come. I

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have none. On the other hand, I cannot summon help. I have no communication with the outside world except through the islanders."

"So here we sit—you and me and the girl!"

"Precisely. Deadlock. Stalemate. If you touch Juanita, you will have to kill me first. I have no fear of death. And if the islanders find my body you will *never* escape."

"And if I lay off the girl?" He guffawed. "Hey, that's good! If I lay off the girl, what about that?"

"I will supply you with a boat from the islanders. They will trust me and ask no questions. It will be on my conscience for the rest of my days, but I will not suffer harm to come to Juanita—and I am content to face my judgment. As you, too, must in the end."

He was silent for a while and far off I could hear the breakers on the reef. Then he said, "All right, Dad, you've got yourself a deal for the night. We'll settle up tomorrow."

We walked back into the room and he said to Juanita, "All right, kid, you can go to bed now. On your own. Me and Dad have made a deal—"

"She will stay here," I interrupted. "Sleep in the chair, child, and I will sit by you."

And so we sat in the quiet room—Robert breathing heavily in the bed; Juanita curled in her chair; the man sometimes sitting, sometimes prowling; and I sitting upright, watching him, and more and more desperately fighting off the creeping tiredness.

Once my leaden eyes closed, and I opened them with a start to see his gaze fixed on Juanita. His tongue was flicking across his upper lip.

He saw me stir, and drawled, "Go on, have your sleep. You trust me, don't you?"

And he laughed again with a harshness that half wakened the children.

I have not used a watch for twenty years, but we must have sat three hours like that, waiting for the slow dawn. And at last the sky was grey instead of blue, and then pink, and the voices of birds began to drown the insect-murmur. The night was over.

I stretched.

"If you want breakfast," I said to the man, "you must get it yourself. I do not intend to leave the children."

"Sure," he said. "Guess you're hungry too."

He went out to the kitchen and returned with a tray—for one. He wolfed the food, slavering over it.

Juanita's eyes were on him, and he said, "I did a deal, Dad, but

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it didn't say I had to feed you! Here—" He held out one of the ripe plum-like fruits to Juanita, and when she drew back he chuckled and thrust it into his own mouth.

He brought in a kitchen knife and, when he had finished eating, he sat tapping the blade—insistently, infuriatingly—on his left thumbnail.

"I been thinking, too," he said. "I been thinking that the last time I trusted a Holy Joe I landed in a reform school. I been thinking, What's to stop you, Dad, filling your lousy church with lousy islanders and then getting up in the pulpit and telling them I'm on the run from Diablo—telling them my knife's in a guy's back—telling them there's a thousand-dollar reward for anyone delivered back to Diablo dead or alive? What's to stop you, Dad?"

"I have given my word," I said.

"You've given your word! In a fish's eye you've given your word! No—I guess I need a little security."

He leapt for Juanita. One hand dragged her from her chair before she could cry out. By the time that I was on my feet he had changed his grip, spun her round so that her back was against him, and he was holding her fast with his left arm bent, jack-knifed round her neck.

His right arm came slowly up; in his hand was the knife. I stopped.

"Juanita," I whispered. "Do not move!"

She was gasping, her eyes wide. His right arm was moving; the point of the knife was at Juanita's throat. "Just like I said. A little security!"

He looked down at the girl and I could see that his nostrils were touching her hair.

"I don't want you to be uncomfortable, honey, so I'm going to loosen my grip. But if you move, if you move one little step, the knife goes in."

The blade moved a trifle nearer. His left arm shifted from her neck. His hand moved down slowly, the fingers splayed. It reached her breasts. The fingers moved.

Juanita looked at me with eyes that screamed silently.

"What do you intend to do?" I asked, my voice bleak to hide my emotions. "It is Sunday. The islanders will expect the church to be ready."

Mercifully, that stopped those dreadful fingers and he turned his attention to me. "Church . . . yes. Well, I want to keep you in my sight all the time. Let's all go. And just remember where this knife is."

We started walking down the bungalow steps and across the

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clearing to my poor church. Juanita walked before him, his arm on her shoulder, the knife at her neck. I walked by her side.

Suddenly he stopped and cursed.

" You damn lyin' Holy Joe! Thought you'd fool me, did you? What time is it? "

" Almost time for my morning service."

" You must think I'm stupid or something. Everyone knows you don't have a church service without ringin' the bell. Every Sunday them natives come across to church, you said."

" That is right."

" And I guess you thought if they missed their lousy bell for the first time in twenty years, they'd all come screamin' over to see what was up, huh? Gee, I've got to hand it to you Holy Joes. You give me your promise you won't give a warnin'—and you put out the alarm just by doin' nothing. Great! "

" I keep my word," I said. " I do not intend to give any alarm."

" You don't intend! Well, I got a surprise for you, Dad. Every Sunday for three years I rang that bell on Diablo. That's how I know. If I didn't ring it right, a guy slugged me till I did. Your islanders will hear their church bell—and I'll ring it myself just in case you get any bright ideas about changin' the chimes! "

He walked towards the flaking tower of the church. At the door I said, " A bell rope needs two hands."

" Thought of everything, haven't you? You and the girl will stand where I can see you. After all, you've nowhere to run to. And I've got the knife."

So Juanita and I stood just outside the doorway while he put the knife in his belt and reached up both hands to the hanging rope.

" I forbid you," I called sternly to him with all the willpower I could command.

No sunlight came into the tower, and we could see only his dark figure.

" No, Father," Juanita whispered. " No. "

" I beg you," I said, " in the name of whatever you hold dear, believe me now—"

He spat into the dust.

He rose on his toes, his young body taut, and pulled on the rope with all his weight. There was a creaking high above his head, a tiny shower of plaster. With a cry, Juanita flung herself to the ground, sobbing.

The man turned his head to look at her, his hands still on the rope. Before he could turn back, the creaking was a roaring and a rushing, and in a swirling avalanche of debris the timbers and

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the bell and the rope were on him. The bell clanged once, the only time it had sounded since the typhoon damaged the tower; the tower we were too poor to repair.

I hurried forward. He was breathing faintly, but his eyes could not see me. I bent to try to lift the great weight from his crushed body.

" Father," said Juanita, "the islanders will help you. Look—"

I rose and stared out, and round the point the first boats were gliding into the still waters of the lagoon, as they did every Sunday at this hour. Absentmindedly I began to brush the dust from my robe.

Juanita put her arm about my waist. " Father," she said, " there's a button missing from your cassock."

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★ ★ ★

SLINGS AND ARROWS

Whether you are a dab hand at a Parthian shot, or, like the Old Man of Thermopylae, can never do anything properly, have a bang at our martial posers. Outmanœuvred? Beat a strategic retreat to page 33.

1. *At which battles were these remarks made:*
   - *a. They run! They run!*
   - *b. Fight on, my merry men!*
   - *c. Don't shoot till you see the whites of their eyes.*

2. *Which generals were known by these sobriquets:*
   - *a. Gentlemanly Johnny;*
   - *b. The Iron Duke;*
   - *c. Blood and Guts.*

3. *What battles were won on:*
   - *a. The Plains of Abraham;*
   - *b. The playing fields of Eton;*
   - *c. St. Crispin's Day.*

4. *Which was a famous victory, according to old Caspar?*

5. *In which war was the first official war correspondent gazetted?*

6. *In which wars did these occur, and where:*
   - *a. The Battle of the Bulge;*
   - *b. The Battle above the Clouds;*
   - *c. The Battle of the Three Emperors.*

7. *What is a Pyrrhic victory?*

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A KISS FOR CHOICE

" What are you deciding ? " she said

BY BORDEN DEAL

THE Motley crew was seven brothers, a corn-liquor-drinking, hound-dog-hunting, fist-fighting bunch of boys, each different in his own way, yet each somehow with the Motley stamp upon him. Seven of them, raised wild without a mother, and you wondered sometimes how the old man ever managed it.

I guess he couldn't have done it without the Motley pride on his side: no matter how much they fought among themselves in fun and jest, when an outsider turned on them he faced seven fierce brothers instead of one. They had always stood together, each a man in his own right and yet part of the Motley unit—until Jewel Watson came home that summer.

The eldest was John Tom, a big rangy man with a black look about him and the proud Motley neck like a stubborn stallion, blackness in his eyes and in the skin of his face and, when the devil was with him, in his soul, too, it was said.

Next was Howard Martin, then Clefton Ashley, and those after him, in order, through Woodrow Wilson Motley, Q. T. Motley, Robert Louis Stevenson Motley, down to the last one, the seventh son, the strange one, Septimus Motley—the only one with a nickname—whom they called Sepp.

The thing that happened about Jewel Watson happened between the first and the fourth, John Tom and Woodrow Wilson, who were like the night and the day, for Woodrow Wilson was fair where John Tom was dark—with blond hair and a laughing face and a fair, bright flesh that made him the Number One Motley with the girls. And he took advantage of it; he enjoyed his dancing and his loving, and he smiled at them and left them with a feeling of gratitude in their hearts that lasted at least until he was out of sight. He was this way until the night he saw Jewel Watson.

On the other hand, John Tom Motley was not easy with the girls, for he was given to sudden dark moods, and that puzzles a woman. No courting man should ever puzzle a woman in that

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way. He had been known to get up abruptly and walk away from a girl's side and go off into the woods and stay away all day or the rest of the night.

Sometimes he would do this in the middle of a dance when the courting would just be getting interesting, and so he was known to be unreliable among the girls and women of that valley. He was this way until the night he saw Jewel Watson.

Jewel Watson had been there all the time, but neither of them had seen her. She was quietly growing up, known to all, and one day in the spring she had gone over the mountain to help take care of an ailing sister and her newborn baby.

On the night of her return she went with two sisters to a dance. Woodrow Wilson Motley saw her first, sitting on a bench against the wall, watching the dancing couples. He went up to her and took her hand. "Jewel Watson," he said, "it's time for you and me to be dancing together."

She smiled and laughed to hear him talk so, and stood up with that graceful movement of a woman who newly knows she's a woman, and came into his arms. The hillfolk don't go much for square dancing any more, round dancing has become far more popular, and Woodrow Wilson held her tightly in his arms as he spun her across the floor.

While they were dancing, John Tom came through the doorway and looked into her face over his brother's shoulder, and looked again, standing frozen there in the doorway, his dark face still and sombre with the discovery of her.

There is no cutting-in in a hill dance; when one boy cuts in on another it's a challenge to fight. So John Tom stood still in the doorway until the dance had ended and Woodrow Wilson led her back to the bench and sat down beside her, laughing and talking with her.

Just before the music started, John Tom walked across the floor and stood before her. "Give me this dance," he said in his abrupt way, staring at her.

Woodrow Wilson looked up into his dark face, seeing the expression in his eyes.

"Meet my new girl, John Tom," he said pleasantly, watching John Tom's face. "Jewel Watson, who has come back to us a beautiful woman."

She blushed to hear him talk so.

"I've met her," John Tom said, without even looking at him, without taking his eyes away from Jewel. "Give me this dance," he said again to her.

Jewel sat still for a moment, for she knew that this could mean fighting between the men. It would have, too, except that they

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were brothers; and brothers do not fight each other easily, without much provocation, about man-sized things, even if they are Motley brothers.

John Tom kept looking at her, while she was waiting to see what Woodrow Wilson would do or say. feeling the beauty of her in his mind.

She was a little girl and there was a smooth oliveness in her skin that is not usual among our people. Her eyes were slanty eyes, deep and brilliant and large, but slanty eyes that tilted strangely in her face, making her deliciously different.

And where in the spring she had been gawky like a colt, now she was all of one piece, moving gracefully and well with the liquid rhythm of a good horse or a womanly woman.

Woodrow Wilson kept on looking at John Tom without moving and then, having given him time enough for challenge, Jewel got up without a word and went to John Tom. He lifted his arms to receive her, and, with the waiting, the music was well into the tune now. They merged into the dancing crowd.

There was no talking between them as they danced, as there had been with Woodrow Wilson, talking and laughing. John Tom danced almost as if it were a duty, without gazing down into her face, holding her carefully instead of close, just letting her nearness be enough.

Woodrow Wilson watched them for a moment, a strangeness in his eyes, and then he got up and walked out of the door, unable to watch them together any longer. He returned quickly when he heard the music stop but he was too late; he met John Tom in the doorway.

John Tom was alone and, over his shoulder, Woodrow Wilson saw Jewel sitting again on the bench.

John Tom looked at Woodrow Wilson.

" I'm taking her home," John Tom said, the statement sure and true in his dark voice, looking at his younger brother with the authority of the eldest.

" *I'm* taking her home," Woodrow Wilson said, laughing suddenly, throwing the challenge at him, for in the Motley crew there was no eldest and youngest, only equal brotherhood.

They looked at each other for a moment and then turned away from the expression they each faced, not wanting to acknowledge formally the conflict between them.

John Tom glanced back towards Jewel just in time to see another boy, by name Walker Thompson, approach her and ask her to dance.

" We might neither one of us take her home," he said quietly. " That would settle it, I reckon."

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Woodrow Wilson looked too and then swung his glance back to John Tom. He dug into his pocket and brought out a coin.

" Heads or tails? " he asked.

John Tom did not even look at him. " Heads," he said.

Woodrow Wilson spun the coin, slapped it on the back of his hand, and glanced at it. " I win," he said.

He walked into the dancing couples, threading among them, and tapped Walker Thompson on the back. Walker Thompson stopped dancing abruptly and turned towards him. They stared at each other and then they both walked to the door, the challenge accepted and given, leaving Jewel alone on the dance floor. They passed John Tom going into the darkness down towards the cars parked in a circle of readiness, their turned-on headlights making an arena for fighting. John Tom did not follow them, but stood in the doorway, his eyes on Jewel.

When Woodrow Wilson came back, wiping blood from his face, the outside competition soundly beaten, he saw that they were dancing together again. He calculated quickly in his mind that he had been gone for three dances.

" I thought I'd won," he said aloud to himself, for the girls like the men to fight over them. " But maybe I didn't, after all."

He waited patiently until the dance ended and then claimed the next.

He and John Tom danced turn and turn about until the dance was over and then the two of them walked Jewel home, one on each side of her, each holding one hand. Woodrow Wilson laughed and talked with her but John Tom walked silently, darkly, with little to say.

Jewel did not show what she felt or thought; she walked between the two brothers without favouritism, talking to them both, her laughter a light tinkle among their heavier tones, like the sound of a mountain creek in the trees. They left her at her doorstep and turned together to walk away, keeping side by side, step by step.

After they left the yard Woodrow Wilson began to trot, moving a pace ahead at first, but John Tom picked up the rhythm and moved up beside him. Within a hundred yards they were running hard, side by side, step by step, running through the fruitful, balmy night without speech, the only sound their young feet light and quick on the lane.

It was summer time, with a feel of fullness in the air, and the young men's blood was hot and good in their veins. There was a slight breeze that night, a full moon, and the pines whispered at them as they ran. The moonlight splashed at them in the open spaces.

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The running was hard and even and ruthless on the lungs and legs. It was six miles from the doorstep of Jewel's house to the Motley place and they ran the six miles without faltering. When they came into the yard they were step with step, side by side, breast by breast. There was not an inch between them as they finished fast into the yard and stopped, panting, facing each other without even seeing the other five brothers standing on the porch watching them.

"You boys having a little race?" Robert Louis Stevenson asked dryly.

They dropped down on the porch steps side by side, their lungs bellowing for air. For a moment they could not speak. Then Woodrow Wilson flung his head up, saying words triumphantly first.

"Just a little contest," he said. "It's a fine summer night. A fine night for running."

"It's a better way than fighting," Sepp said. His strange eyes glowed in the dark. He was the seventh son, and the others were sometimes afraid of him. "But it will come to that if you don't stop it now."

"Glad to stop it any time," John Tom growled. "All Woodrow Wilson has to do is quit trying to cut in on me and take my girl."

"I saw her first," Woodrow Wilson said lightly. But there was an edge in his voice.

"Let's leave it now," Clefton Ashley said. He was the quiet one who did the cooking and the cleaning. "Let's leave it now. Tomorrow is a working day."

The next day they were cutting wood for the winter, and they sawed against each other all day long, one on each end of the cross-cut, each refusing to be relieved by any of the other five. They sawed a mort of wood that day, too—it was said in the countryside that two men had never cross-cut so many logs in one day before in the memory of man.

When the sun went down they were dripping wet with sweat and their shoulders drooped with fatigue.

But they had hardly straightened their bent backs when John Tom was running, getting a head start on Woodrow Wilson in his surprise, running hard and fast towards the house in his exhaustion.

Woodrow Wilson let out a shout and ran after him, straining to catch up. He gained slowly for a while, and then John Tom got caught on the barbs climbing through a fence and Woodrow Wilson vaulted the four-strand barbed wire in a running leap to catch him.

They came into the yard, panting, and dropped to the grass,

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lying there, their lungs gasping for air. They did not move until Clefton Ashley appeared on the back porch and told them supper was ready. They got up then, washed their faces in the washpan on the porch, and went into the kitchen.

"Now, we can't afford for you to eat against each other, too," Robert Louis Stevenson said. "You'll just eat us out of house and home. So sit down and behave yourselves."

They sat down at the long table with the other boys and waited for the Old Man to say grace. But he did not move, looking at them from under his beetling brows. He was a big, rangy, tough hickory of an old man, with a face the colour and texture of saddle leather. "You seven boys have fought each other all your natural-born days," he said, his voice rumbling directly at John Tom and Woodrow Wilson. He stopped a moment, his gnarled hands on the table on each side of his plate. "But you ain't never fought each other about man-sized things."

John Tom and Woodrow Wilson sat stiff under his gaze, without looking at him or at each other.

"I hope you never will," the Old Man said quietly. "I hope you never will." He bowed his head and said grace.

Maybe it wasn't a contest in eating, but they put away plenty, for it had been a hard day. They finished and got up together, going to the back porch again where they stripped off their shirts and washed their upper bodies. They both put on dress trousers and open-collared white shirts and before the sun was two hours down they stood on the porch again, ready to go.

They walked down the steps, each braced against the other, into the yard. Then John Tom stopped.

"Look," he said, "I'm not quitting. But if we run against each other them six miles over there, neither one of us will be in a condition to sit and talk to a girl. We'll be sweaty and panting as if we had come straight from the field."

Woodrow Wilson considered. "All right," he said. "No running—at least on the way there."

They sat with her on the porch until midnight and then ran the six miles home. But this time it was not a solitary race; somehow the word had got round that day, and clumps and clusters of boys and young men were spaced along the route they would follow. When the brothers came into sight they would stand up, hollering and yelling, the voices grouped and musical in the after-midnight air, and they would run with them for a time, encouraging one or the other.

But Woodrow Wilson and John Tom paid them no heed, running silently and grimly, and the pace was slower than it had been the night before. When they drew up into the yard they

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were side by side again, stride for stride, their young bodies evenly matched.

John Tom stopped in the yard and flung himself down on the ground. Woodrow Wilson stood for a second longer and collapsed slowly, worn to a frazzle, unable to stand on his knotted legs. They lay quietly for a minute under the gaze of their five brothers who had waited up to see them come home. The Old Man was long since sound asleep in bed.

Finally John Tom rolled over and sat up. "It don't look like running is going to settle it," he said.

Woodrow Wilson lay still. "No," he said slowly. "Don't look like it will. And I don't know what would."

They watched each other in the moonlight and the five other brothers stood on the porch apart from them. There was a separateness for the first time between the fourth brother and the first one.

"I said it would come to fighting," Sepp said, and the tone of his voice put a shiver into all of them. For they knew it would not be an ordinary fight when John Tom and Woodrow Wilson came together.

"That's what it's always taken," Woodrow Wilson said thoughtfully. "Between two men when they both wanted the same girl."

They lay side by side, looking at each other, and then John Tom stood up. His dark voice was heavy in the air when he spoke. "I'm taking Jewel Watson home from that dance tomorrow night. I want to marry her. I don't know what you want with her but, knowing your ways with women, I've got my notions. And Jewel is worth more than that."

It was the first bitter word said between them and John Tom had said it. Woodrow Wilson's face tightened and he stood up, too.

"Maybe I've changed my mind and decided to settle down," he said. "Maybe I figure it's time to get married, too. Who are you to say what's in my heart?"

John Tom faced the truth of his words but the love in him could not bend before it. "I can't say it," he admitted and there was no grudging in his tone. "But I'm still taking her home tomorrow night."

Woodrow Wilson walked past him towards the porch. He looked up into Sepp's glowing eyes, and felt a shiver go over him.

"Maybe," he said. "Maybe . . ."

The dance was crowded that night, for the news spread quickly and everybody wanted to see John Tom and Woodrow Wilson meet. Each of them had had many fights and had lost few, and

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the betting was heavy on both sides. Woodrow Wilson came early and claimed Jewel, dancing with her every dance, and the others watched them together, waiting for the appearance of John Tom. There was a troubled look on Jewel's face as she danced; she did not smile and laugh as she had before. She and Woodrow Wilson did not even talk, and Woodrow kept watching the door.

It was nearly midnight, nearly time for the dance to end, when John Tom came. For he had not said he was coming to dance; he had said he was taking Jewel Watson home. And now he had come to do it.

He stood suddenly in the doorway and looked at them, and there was a stillness in the room. The fiddle stopped on a false note that scraped the nerves like a nail drawn across a tin roof.

John Tom walked into the room. "I've come to take you home, Jewel," he said. His voice was soft as he spoke to her, and he watched her face without looking at Woodrow Wilson.

Jewel stood uncertainly between them, a little woman, small and neat and lovely, between the rangy, heavy bodies of the two brothers, the dark and the fair. She looked up into John Tom's face, her own face troubled. Then Woodrow Wilson moved.

"If you can," he said quietly.

They looked at each other, measuring each other, the first and the fourth, and they were brothers, equal in the right of their manhood.

"I can," John Tom said.

"Let's see about that," Woodrow Wilson said.

Jewel gave a little gasp that was loud in the room, in the silence of the people.

John Tom turned then, and walked stiffly towards the door, for there is a convention in the hills against fighting inside the house.

Woodrow Wilson followed him and they walked between the people into the yard, walking almost side by side until they reached the cleared space where the cars were parked, and by the time they got there the lights were on, bathing the sandy arena in a harsh glow.

They walked into the arena, still side by side, moving like gamecocks. Suddenly Woodrow Wilson grasped John Tom's arm, whirled him, turned him, and struck him full in the face, the sudden blow bringing a gasp from the crowd. John Tom growled and sprang upon Woodrow, bringing him to the ground, his hands doubled and pounding at him.

Woodrow rolled and twisted under him and sprang to his feet, moving crouched, blood already on his face, as it was on John Tom's.

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Then they were no longer alone in the arena. Jewel flew in between them, her hands pushing at them, her voice scolding and frantic. "What are you deciding?" she said. "What do you think you're fighting about?"

They stopped, bewildered, watching her. This was an unprecedented thing, the girl coming into the fighting in this way. She stood before them, taut with fury, her hands clenched.

"You think I'll automatically love the man that beats up the other one?"

They stood abashed before her. John Tom looked down at the ground, his dark, glowering face sombre and withdrawn, feeling guilty and ashamed. Woodrow Wilson could not meet her eyes either.

"I don't know which one I love," Jewel said. "I just don't know. But why don't you two fools enter a contest that might prove something?"

They looked at her then, hope dawning in their eyes.

"Each of you walk in the moonlight with me for five minutes," she said, her voice challenging them. "I will kiss each of you. And then *I* will decide who is the winner." She flung back her head proudly. "It may be that both of you will lose."

Woodrow Wilson looked at John Tom. They stared at each other for a moment while the crowd held its breath. Then Woodrow Wilson dug into his pocket for a coin, spun it in the air, and clapped it on his wrist. "Heads or tails?" he asked.

"Heads," John Tom said.

Woodrow Wilson looked at the coin. "I win." He turned his head to look at Jewel. "I go first," he said, and there was a lightness and gaiety in his voice that had not been there for days.

Jewel came to his side and took his hand, her face flushed as the crowd watched her. She led Woodrow Wilson out of the circle into the darkness, and the crowd parted to watch them go. They disappeared beyond a clump of pines in the moonlight.

The five minutes seemed a long time. John Tom stood still and lonely in the abandoned arena where the battle was no longer being fought. His head was low and he stared at the ground, the only one not watching for their reappearance.

Then they came back, walking slowly out of darkness into light, and Jewel's colour was even higher and there was a strange look in her slanty eyes. She dropped Woodrow Wilson's hand and it seemed that she did so lingeringly; and no wonder, for he was known to have a way with women.

She took the hand of the dark man, the silent, sombre one named John Tom Motley, and walked with him out of the circle, leaving Woodrow Wilson standing alone. He watched after them

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until they disappeared into the dappling of the moonlight and there was a strange look on his face, too.

Five minutes stretched lingeringly—longer, it seemed, than the first five. Woodrow Wilson stood waiting, and from the way he stood there was a confidence in him. Five more minutes passed and there was a wilting in Woodrow Wilson and the crowd was beginning to stir. Five more minutes and still they did not return. Woodrow Wilson waited another agonising time that was not measured in seconds, that seemed for ever in the stillness and the waiting, and at last he forced himself to move.

" I guess I've lost this time," he said, his voice suddenly loud in the quietness. He tried to speak lightly but failed.

" There they are," a voice said out of the crowd, and then all could see.

They were walking farther away from the crowd, blended together in the moonlight, their arms about each other.

" Yes," Woodrow Wilson said softly. " I guess I lost this time. She has given her decision." He smiled then, his flesh bright again as he shook off the burden, and he laughed, carefree silver in the mellow summer night. He looked at the crowd round him.

" Anybody want to run a race? " he challenged. " I can still outrun any man here." He turned his head to look towards the place where the dark man and the slanty-eyed girl had disappeared. " Anybody except my brother John Tom Motley," he said. " And John Tom Motley has retired from any such doing as that."

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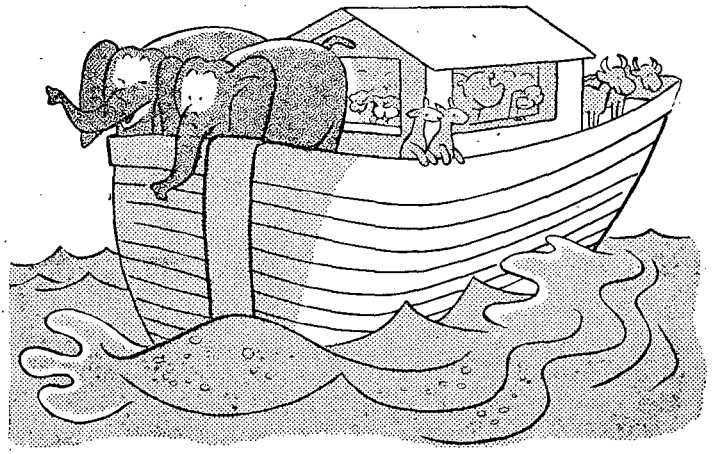

" How can I be sure this isn't just a shipboard romance? "

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NEVER SAY DAI

We were awakened by a heavy thud and sounds of scrabbling

BY W. H. BOORE

IT WAS the old grandfather clock that seemed to start things happening, just because Dai happened to allude to it that bright morning.

" Remember," said Dai to me over the breakfast porridge, which we still used to eat although we hated the stuff because we would have hated still more to think of my mother-in-law turning in her grave, " remember, it's twelve months ago to the day, and the old clock has never gone again since her passing."

" It was worth stopping for," said I.

" Blodwen, my dear," Dai began in his you-really-shouldn't sort of voice. Then he grinned and came over to kiss the back of my neck. " We are both agreed," said he, " that she was a very fine woman, but improving with distance."

Now Megan, our eldest, has got to feeling what we are thinking without saying. " Hasn't Grandma gone to heaven? " she asked.

" There is no doubt," said I, " there is no doubt that your grandmother was good enough for heaven; the doubt is whether heaven was good enough for your grandmother. I bet they've had to do a bit of tidying up there lately."

Dai strolled off then to the pit office where he is an overhead on the cost of coal, and shortly afterwards I went out shopping. " Now, Megan," I said as I popped through the door, " as you are on holiday there's no harm in you working; so you and little Ruth can clear the table and wash the dishes, being careful with the pink cup which is your father's favourite and hard to match without him knowing."

Only a bit of bacon, and some bread and tea and butter and sugar. Not enough, one would think, to keep me from the house so long as to miss all that did not happen, I am sure, whatever they say. Such honest children always, too—with Dai and me bringing them up the proper way, whatever my mother-in-law used to say about our methods.

I noticed the space as soon as I got home.

" Where," I said, " is the grandfather clock? "

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"The man took it," said Megan.

"What man?" I asked.

"The nice man," said Ruth, and I knew what she meant. There are two kinds of men in the world—nice men, and men who do not give sweets to small girls.

"He took it through the window," said Megan, "because his wings were too big for the door."

"I pulled out one of his feathers when he wasn't looking," said Ruth, and she handed me a long quill. A beautiful thing it was, firm as a poker yet soft as the breath of a child asleep, and so white that it made the room look shabby.

I pulled myself together. "Somebody's hen uses a well-known soap powder," said I.

Dai came in just then for his midmorning cup of tea—only coffee being served at the office and Dai having been brought up to know that coffee is second only to strong drink.

Dai whispered to me, when he had heard the story, "Never call children liars to their faces; just bring it home to them by showing the real way of things—that's psychology."

He turned to Megan. "Why did the nice gentleman want the clock?"

"For Grandma," said Megan in her most reasonable tone of voice. "He told me Grandma said heaven is not heaven without the clock; and anyway, she cannot cook porridge by eternity."

While Dai was gathering himself together from all directions after sitting through—repeat through—his chair, I whispered to him, "Now remember, children are not liars, as you just pointed out."

Dai nodded. "Fanciful, perhaps," said he, bravely, as I thought. "Fanciful, perhaps, but not liars."

"And if it's about your mother," said I, "a bit of fancy might help."

Suddenly Dai looked cunning.

"We will put them to rights," said he, registering firmness not unmixed with kindness, like on the pictures, though perhaps not quite so well. He took the beautiful white feather from Ruth.

"Now, Megan," said he, "what sort of a bird has feathers like this?"

"A man-bird," said Megan promptly.

"A nice man-bird," said Ruth, licking her lips.

Dai made a noise with his throat, like swallowing soup and finding it too hot. However, Dai is a strong character, or he could not have lived against his mother for so long without being crushed or stiffened, and glory be he had come up the right way.

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In a minute or two he was speaking again, calm as could be, except that he had to repeat it when the sound would come as well.

" I will tell you what sort of a feather it is," said he. Then he bent down to have a good look at it. " At least, your mother will," he went on.

I took a good look at that wonderful feather. " I'll leave it to you, dear," said I modestly.

" I will take it down to the poultry shop and get an expert opinion," said Dai, carefully and firmly not calling the girls liars.

" And I will try to find out if anyone saw the clock being taken."

Tuesday was beef at the office canteen, so I did not see Dai until the evening. He came in carrying the feather and not as polite as he ought to be to children who, if fanciful, are truthful at heart.

" What did Jones the poultry shop say? " I asked.

Dai looked bitter. " He said it was very well made and I was wasting my talents in an office." He sat down where the seat of the chair had been before he sat there the previous time.

" Did you find out," said he, when he had recovered his self-respect, " whether anyone had seen the clock being stolen? "

I shook my head. " Nothing unusual noticed in the district," I answered, " except that Sergeant Price said another unidentified object had been seen in the neighbourhood, and if he found any flying saucers he was going to use them for giving the cat its milk."

We spent our evening thinking hard of other things, but finding subjects for conversation rather scarce, with the white feather on the mantelpiece and the wallpaper unfaded in the shape where the clock had covered it. " We're insured against theft," said Dai suddenly. " I'll put in a claim."

" With the usual statement of the circumstances," I said.

" Kids," said Dai bitterly.

We would have left the matter unsolved, I am sure. It had happened, and the clock had gone, and the children had been telling us the most appalling tales, but what could we do about it? I told Megan next morning—without calling her a liar, of course, " If you can get away with that sort of story you ought to be in politics." And that would have been the end of it, but for what happened in the afternoon.

I had just slipped in next door to have a chat with Mrs. Rees, and I was not gone longer than it takes to pass the time of day. Well, I mean, one cannot be rude; it is only civil to exchange a few words, and I had to rush back to prepare the tea for Dai.

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" He came again," said Megan, and there was no need for me to ask who.

" Funny thing," said I, " that these things happen when there is no one here to see that they don't."

I did not want to ask questions as if I believed her; yet I was as anxious to find out how the story was going as if it was the next instalment of " Love Finds a Way," in *Womankind*, threepence every Thursday. I flatter myself that my question was finally worded in a properly discouraging form.

" And what was he supposed to have come for this time? "

" The key," said Megan. " He forgot to take the key of the clock yesterday."

" The same man? " I asked.

Megan nodded.

" But his face was red," said Ruth.

Dai was put out; anyone could see that. It is one thing not to call the children liars, and another to let them drag on with their wicked tales. " No knowing where this sort of thing will lead," said Dai, " they'll grow up into delinquents or short story writers or something."

He tackled the children again, of course. " Now, Megan, where did you put the key of the clock? "

" I gave it to the man," she said.

" He slipped it under his crown," said Ruth.

" *Where—is—the—key?* " asked Dai, one word at a time and each one heavy.

" We are telling the truth," said Megan.

" Yes, yes," said Dai, waving his hands about, " I know you're telling the truth, but what did you do with that key? "

It was after the girls had gone to bed that Dai had his next idea. " The feather," said he. " I've got a friend who's a teacher at the High School; he's an orni—orni— anyway, he knows about birds. I'll take it to him."

Dai came back with a baffled look an hour or so later. " He can't tell offhand," he told me, " but he says it will be quite easy to establish what it is by analysing it. Still, why bother? If the clock's gone, the key might as well be lost, too."

Dai and his High School friend, I could see, had been taking soothing syrup with a good head of froth from tall glasses, and I sighed heavily, for Dai was not one to let his feelings lead him into such ways. Still, perhaps it was better that he had done so. We would forget the affair in time, and perhaps nobody the worse in the long run.

That was what I thought that evening, and we went to bed with the feeling of having come out on the other side, as it were.

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Never mind the clock, or the key; and say nothing more to the girls.

"We'll pretend it never happened," said Dai, "and we'll put fresh paper on the wall to hide where the clock was. And if the children ever mention the thing, we'll just say, 'Clock; what clock?' And in the end, they'll forget the time when they told their parents such—er—well, they'll forget it."

But they did not.

Next morning we were awakened by a heavy thud and sounds of scrabbling downstairs as if a whole army was working with bulldozers. We hurried into the girls' room, but their bed was empty.

Now there was a time when Dai and I could have gone down those stairs side by side—with not much room to spare, perhaps, but we could have done it. But the years gather round the figure, and the fact that we had sort of launched ourselves from the top landing caused us to be jammed between banisters and wall with our feet off the ground. There's silly I felt, like riding a bicycle without a bicycle.

"Breathe out together," I said.

"Don't be daft," said Dai, "it's the upper part of me I breathe with."

By the time we got downstairs, the two girls were alone and as innocent as you please.

"It was the nice man again," said Megan. "He said the striking weight was missing, and he came back for it."

I could see Dai was liable to say something he would be sorry for later, so I thought I had better play the affair along for a bit. "And I suppose your grandmother had sent him again?" I asked.

Megan shook her head and looked prim. "He didn't say so; but he said something about—about—about an elderly lady dog."

Now there is only one way of dealing with some things, and that is to deal with something else. Dai did so now. "Porridge be damned," he said, "I want bacon, two eggs, and marmalade toast to keep my strength up."

When not a word was said about the one thing we were both thinking, I knew Dai's condition was becoming serious.

He sat with his back to the feather; he stood with his back to the feather; he walked with his back to the feather; and when he turned it was by revolving with his back to the feather. I knew it was time I took a hand.

It's no good leading with the feather, I thought. I'll just cut a few fronds off it and take them up to the High School myself

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this morning. A feather gives ideas. If they don't know what they're looking for, they might find out what it is—or, better still, what it is not.

A nice man that master was: so calm, and so quick with a little gas jet and some shapes in glass, while I sat near the window and looked at the bottles of dead frogs and toads and snakes and bits of legs and intestines, thinking how pretty and normal they all looked.

He was about half an hour altogether.

"Quite ordinary," said he when he brought the result, "quite ordinary; nothing strange about these whiskers that you have brought, except that they are unusually fine and silky. They are—" and here he looked carefully at his notes—"they are hair from a gentleman; brought up, I should say, on a refined vegetarian diet."

"Such as?" I asked.

"Honey," said he. "And milk."

"Working pretty hard you are, I expect," I said.

"We are reasonably busy," he answered.

"And no time for meals," I said.

"I am not a big eater."

"And late nights."

"It all depends," he replied.

"And nobody to see you are well clad against this funny weather."

A bit stiff, he was, handing me back what was left of my feather fronds. And his conclusions—well, I thought, what can you expect from the poor fellow, tired out, half starved, and nearly frozen?

Now Dai was gone with a party from the office to visit another colliery to study new ways of spending money, as far as I could make out.

"Automatic accounting," Dai had said, which seemed a nice homely sort of thing. And he was not expected back until about half past eleven that night, earning overtime for a day out; and I was sitting reading in the kitchen after the children had gone to bed, when I thought that I heard a sound in the front room.

Now the light switch in that room is at the far end in the standard lamp, so the place was in darkness when I entered—well, almost in darkness. Dark except for a circle of dim golden light, with a face in profile against it as handsome as a book-end.

"Who are you?" I asked. "If you don't mind," said I. "Please," I added. "Sir," I said.

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" I was wondering," said the visitor—and I could see his lips moving. I had never noticed words sideways on before. " I was wondering if you could do a bit of mending for me." He paused and cleared his throat in a beautiful tenor way.

" You see," he went on, " I happened this morning to express my opinion of certain old—a certain lady; and no sooner had the words sullied my lips than the lightning struck my—er—my headgear. Now if you could just draw it together for me . . ."

The visitor has gone now, with the golden circle behind his head shining as good as new. And I am waiting for Dai to come back. Waiting, and wanting advice badly. How do I get it over to him? I have got him a very nice supper. I have been rehearsing what I shall say, and how I shall say it.

" Come in, Dai," I shall say, " come in; it was an angelic feather. Take off your shoes, Dai; that feather was angelic. Put on your slippers, dear Dai; that feather was from an angel's wing. We've got prawns on toast for supper; that feather, you know, belonged to an angel after all."

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SOLUTIONS to SLINGS AND ARROWS

on page 16

1. *a. To Wolfe at Quebec; b. Earl Douglas, at Otterburn; c. Instructions to American troops at Bunkers Hill.*
2. *a. General Burgoyne; b. The Duke of Wellington; c. General Paton.*
3. *a. Quebec; b. Waterloo; c. Agincourt.*
4. *Blenheim.*
5. *The Crimean War.*
6. *a. Ardennes, World War II; b. Chattanooga, American Civil War; c. Austerlitz, Napoleonic Wars.*
7. *A victory won at such enormous cost that it amounts practically to a defeat. Named after King Pyrrhus of Epirus, who beat the Romans at Asculum in 279 B.C.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD

on page 144

Across. 1, *Inspect.* 5, *Sputnik.* 9, *Instruction.* 11, *Nut.* 12, *Axe.* 13, *Easy one.* 14, *Usher.* 16, *Drear.* 18, *Sir.* 20, *Season.* 21, *Bottom.* 22, *End.* 24, *Tally.* 27, *Lemon.* 29, *Animate.* 30, *Oat.* 31, *Lea.* 32, *Territorial.* 33, *Throw in.* 34, *Donated.*
Down. 2, *Stitch.* 3, *Easter.* 4, *Thrusts.* 5, *Succour.* 6, *United.* 7, *Nonage.* 8, *Inquisition.* 10, *Detrimental.* 15, *Easel.* 17, *Rathe.* 19, *Inn.* 22, *Edition.* 23, *Diamond.* 25, *Litter.* 26, *Yarrow.* 27, *Legion.* 28, *Mallet.*

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Island Race

**An Englishman, even if he is alone,
forms an orderly queue of one . . .**

GEORGE MIKES

When Earth in Eden did awake
And Man was made and mated.
The earliest men, by some mistake,
Were foreigners all created.
And in this fix the world began,
(Till Heaven conceived a nobler plan)
And there was born an Englishman,
With a fa la la la la la la.

Still half the sphere in darkness sat
But Britons went and found it.
The heathen swore the Earth was flat,
We flung the flag all round it;
And if the sea, with stealthy care,
Threw up an island anywhere,
An Englishman was always there,
With a fa la la la la la la.

A. P. HERBERT

Les Anglais—

She talked so much about black circles under my eyes, I always thought that was just an Irish speciality, but she said the French go in for it in a big way. I said maybe it's just people who had to live alongside the English all their lives . . .

Delphine said one time, " I am glad you had love with a Philadelphia man. They are like an Englishman who has got over the worst of it . . . Keety, I knew an English officer in the War, he is very happy memory. They are simple and so dear, it brings out the best of a woman because she have to think for both. French women forgive the Germans much on account of the English they brought into France."

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY, *Kitty Foyle*

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—*The Sassenachs*

It is naturally geven, or els it is of a devyllyshe dysposicion of a Scotysh man, not to love nor favour an Englyshe man.

ANDREW BORDE, *Introduction of Knowledge*

Plum Loco

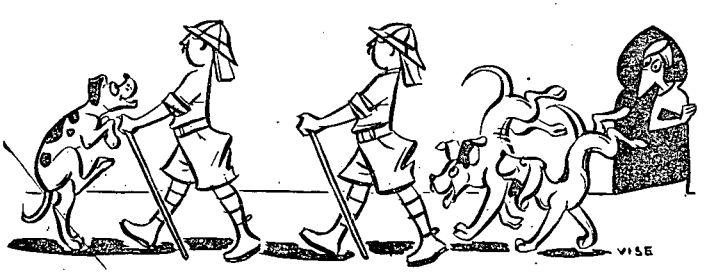
Members of the Island Race, trained as a matter of Imperial Discipline to cement the bonds of Commonwealth with hot stuffed turkey and flaming Christmas pudding (whether they be in an igloo near the Pole or basking on some coral beach within a degree or two of the Equator) settle down with loyal determination, to the astonishment of foreign observers, and to the almost uncontrollable amusement of their oriental servants, to feed their honest steaming faces.

ANDREW GRAHAM, *A Foreign Affair*

Sunstruck

Mad dogs and Englishmen
Go out in the midday sun.
The toughest Burmese bandit
Can never understand it.
In Rangoon the heat of noon
Is just what the natives shun.
They put their Scotch or Rye down—and lie down . . .
In Bangkok at twelve o'clock
They foam at the mouth and run,
But mad dogs and Englishmen
Go out in the midday sun.

NOEL COWARD, *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*



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Wine, Women . . . and Song

In Effect, most of them prefer Wine or Gaming to Women, in which they are the more blameable, because the Women are much better than the Wine in *England.*

LOUIS DE MURALT

O, it's a snug little island!
A right little, tight little island!

THOMAS DIBDIN, *The Snug Little Island*

Horsey Race

Recently, when visiting breweries and two farms, I saw working and draft horses: they resembled elephants . . . One of the horses, smaller, was French, and the farmer said it was not so strong and less able to stand bad weather. Now, wherever I have been I have found this same relationship between the men and horses of a country . . . Again, an able doctor here [in England] who gets a Frenchman among his patients, only prescribes half doses for him: an English dose would be too strong and would do him harm: if you ask a chemist for a purge he will give you calomel: an Englishman often has this drug in his house and swallows a pill of it if his head feels a trifle heavy: the doctors here would be just the thing for French horses.

HIPPOLYTE TAINE, *Notes Sur L'Angleterre*

Insulated—

The Channel is that silver strip of sea which severs merry England from the tardy realms of Europe.

Church and State Review, 1863

—But Not For Long

A tunnel underneath the sea, from Calais straight to Dover, Sir,
That qualmish folks may cross by land from shore to shore,
With sluices made to drown the French, if e'er they would come over, Sir,
Has long been talk'd of, till at length 'tis thought a monstrous bore.

THEODORE HOOK, 1825

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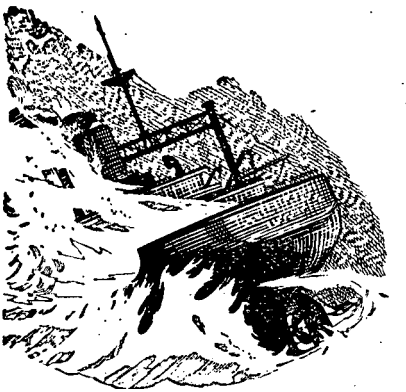
NATURE OF FEAR



by PETER SCOTT

IN the summer of 1940, German bombers had command of the air. On a hot afternoon in the English Channel they came quite suddenly out of the dazzling haze round the sun. A spatter of machine-gun bullets was the first warning; tracers drew thin blue hairlines round the destroyer; and then with a whining roar the first of the Ju 87s pulled out of its dive.

Its bomb fell in the sea fifty yards away and a small spout of white water rose in the air to be engulfed instantly in the vast brown upheaval of the explosion.

Huge pinnacles of water shot upwards as the destroyer reeled and shook.

Ordinary Seaman McGill was knocked down by the blast and the jolt, and then nearly washed overboard by the deluge of water which fell like a cloudburst on the upper deck.

Dim through the brown mist of it he could see the next Stuka steep in its dive. Look out now, he thought, here's another. Quick now.

He scrambled up and scuttled for the protective cover of the galley flat.

The whine of the power dive was followed by a shattering explosion. The whole ship lurched and shook from end to end. The sound was as if the largest tin in the world had been whacked

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with a gigantic stick. With it came the roll of thunder and the crack of doom.

McGill was certain that, in this his first experience of action the ship had been hit, that she must sink instantly; but outside the guns were firing still.

He had been on the way to his Action Station when the first bomb fell, but now he was back in the galley flat with the roar of aircraft and the bark of pom-poms in his ears and the fear of God in his heart. He crouched in a dark corner, the animal instinct to hide in complete control of his body.

The main armament had opened fire; the blast of the 4.7 guns blew into the flat through the ammunition hatches, and the crash of their discharge added to the shattering din. The ship heeled steeply under full rudder at high speed. Supply parties were handing up ammunition through the hatches; repair parties stood waiting.

No one noticed young McGill in the corner by the galley door. He crouched there with both clenched fists held against his head: his face was screwed up, lips apart, eyes half closed. His pulses raced but his mind was numb.

He knew there was something he should be doing but he could not think what it was. Could not think . . . If only there was a chance to think, but everything was noise—noise above anything he had ever imagined—noise that was more felt than heard, that shattered and stunned him.

From very far away he could hear the voices round him.

"Come on—keep that cordite going!"

"Near miss—lots of little holes in No. 2 Boiler Room."

"More boxes of twelve-pounder, quickly!"

". . . crashed about half a mile away."

"Poor old Lofty."

All these things he heard clearly, though far away as in a dream; they did not belong to his world at all.

Suddenly the noise stopped. Someone shouted, "First Aid Party—starboard waist," and three hands shuffled past him with a stretcher.

McGill remained in his dark corner. Still he could not move. He was shivering violently. I must go . . . I must . . .

It was the final effort of his breaking will. He felt he was floating out towards the sunshine from the dark imprisonment of his terror. He was dazzled by the bright sunlight, but with it strength and self-control returned.

He met the stretcher party coming in and recognised the man they were carrying. It was old Hawkshaw, who had been teaching him boatwork from a book that morning. When you had grown

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up with boats and knew as much about them as McGill had learnt at home in Ireland, what with fowling in winter and fishing in summer—all these special names out of books were very bewildering. And what had books to do with this horror that he saw?

Old Hawkshaw! His face grey and twisted; the leg of his overall torn and bloodsoaked; a long dagger of broken bone sticking from the mangled flesh; the hand that had held the book that very morning was not there now.

The stretcher passed, and McGill went out into the afternoon sun.

At the foot of the foc'sle ladder was a great pool of blood, and lying by the funnel was a headless body which someone had partly covered with a hastily thrown duffel coat. The seaboots projected grotesquely. There was movement under the coat.

"Poor old Lofty Reynolds," said a voice at McGill's side.

"But he's still alive," said McGill. "I saw 'm move, so I did."

"Don't you believe it—that's just nerves."

McGill went on up to the foc'sle and sat on a locker near the gun. The bright sun shone down on him. He felt very sick. The rest of the gun's crew were far too busy to notice him.

In the heat of the action the Captain of the gun had never missed one of his extra loading numbers, so no one but McGill himself knew that he had spent those four thunderous minutes crouching in the cover of the galley flat instead of feeding cordite to his gun.

The enemy did not return that afternoon, and when the protecting Spitfires arrived the guns' crews fell out. Most of them sprawled about the upper deck in the sun in sudden relaxation.

McGill was stretched along the length of the locker gazing up into the deep blue of the afternoon sky with half-closed eyes. He was dazzled by the bright sunlight. His breath still came in choking sobs but the numbness was passing. As with cold hands, a terrible smarting pain took its place, filling every corner of his mind.

What difference did it make that no one else knew he had done it? *He* knew. Yes, he knew, but he did not understand. He had depended so much on being brave; he had been so certain that he would be.

It wasn't as though he had never seen fear before in all his eighteen years. They had met face to face in the short steep seas between his home and Chapel Island when he tried to cross on the ebb with a southerly gale.

Those were the nights when the wild geese flighted low and he

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loved to take the boat across, although they said he was mad to go. If it was dangerous he liked it more.

He would come back long after dark, soaked through, with perhaps a goose and a couple of wigeon to show for it, his hair wild and tangled with the rain and the wind, and his cheeks flushed, and Tim, his brother Tim, would give him a look . . . like that . . .

He had beaten fear many times, many fears: the fear of strong winds and strong tides, and fogs and quicksands, and leaky boats. The lough found new ones, but he had their measure—on the soft mud flats of the lough where others were scared to go.

The lough. And Chapel Island.

Just to think of them!

And the bright pastures of Green Island across the soft stillness of the bay; the golden brown of the seaweed and the smell of it; the sighing of the ash trees round the house, and the gentle curve of the grey pebble bank which joined their own island with the mainland shore, and was only covered by the highest spring tides. These were the real things, more real a million times than Ju 87s and destroyers and HETF shells.

The green mound of the island with its tiny farmhouse among the trees on its sheltered side was his home and his life. He longed bitterly and desperately to be there, never to have left it, to wake up from the nightmare that was today.

There was aching pain in remembering his Irish home, for the last passionate sight of it, the whole last scene of departure was the clearest memory of all.

It was not anything they had said. His mother had been very quiet. He had loved her especially for that. " It'll not be long, boy," and she had smiled.

And then, just as his father took up the reins and the cart that was to drop him at the bus stop began to trundle out of the yard, he had looked down at Tim standing below. Tim, not quite two years younger than himself, who had shared every adventure until now.

He had looked very deep into Tim's grey eyes just for a second. In that second he knew that Tim was giving—giving in an agony of generosity all he could of his strength and love, an essence of his spirit. Take *my* sword, too—you may need it.

McGill, by meeting Tim's gaze, had accepted his trust—and now he had betrayed it in his first moments of fear.

Tim would make excuses for him if he knew.

Tim would say, " But you couldn't help it in all that noise. That wasn't your fault."

But it was. He was a coward.

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If only he could see Tim and talk to him. It would ease the shame . . .

" Don't you want no supper, lad? "

McGill opened his eyes and saw the burly figure of Ordinary Seaman Money standing over him.

" No," he said.

" They piped ' hands to supper ' long enough ago."

" I don't care," McGill said fiercely.

" Ee, what's t'matter wi' you? "

" Oh, go away."

Copper Money scratched his ginger head. Most people were pretty talkative this evening, and it wasn't as though McGill had been a special pal of Lofty Reynolds, though of course that might be it. But you never knew where you were with young McGill anyway—a proper Irishman he was, with his black hair and pale blue eyes. Copper didn't know much about Irishmen, but it was a convenient explanation.

He lit a cigarette and sat down on the deck with his back to the foc'sle screen. The sun was setting into a soft grey cloud which lipped the edge of the glass-calm sea. High streaks of mackerel sky turned from silver to gold and from gold to dull red like hot iron cooling.

Copper puffed at his cigarette. Queer chap, young McGill. You never quite knew what he would say next. Then sometimes he had that faraway look in his eyes as though he didn't see or hear what was going on about him. Those were the times when the Petty Officers used to get mad at him for not obeying orders quickly.

Copper had once heard the First Lieutenant talking about him. " What, *that* good-for-nothing? He can't even salute properly."

Copper knew this was an injustice. Although the boy was long-limbed and clumsy there were things he could do—chucking a heaving-line, for instance. He just had the swing of it. And he was a marvel in the whaler, quick as a cat for all his long legs, and he knew how to pull and all.

Besides, he was somehow different.

Copper remembered the night he had first discovered it, on watch at the twelve-pounder. They had been looking towards the moon and its long sparkling lane reflected on the calm sea. McGill had begun to talk about his home. It was the first time Copper had ever heard him talk like this—even his voice seemed different, suddenly alive.

He had talked about the moonlight across Strangford Lough

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and the lapping of the flood tide over the soft mudflats and the stillness broken by the calls of the various birds—he knew the different ones too. Different names they all had. And he had talked a lot about the beauty of it, as though he'd taken special notice of it, like one of those artist chaps.

But he had liked most to talk about the wild geese—the Barnacle he had called them—and the music they made when they fed right into the bay below the house. "Oh, it was rare music, so it was." There was a dreamy quality in his voice, soft like the rain, but with a secret urgency.

Copper, sitting on the Ready Use Locker with his legs dangling, had seen a vision. Something from a different entrancing world, something that you never knew about if you lived in a grey back street in Warrington. He listened happily, and when the watch was relieved and the spell broken he felt sort of flat.

Oh ah, he was a queer one, was young McGill. There he lay now on the locker, brooding, and thinking maybe of the first casualties he had seen—nasty ones to see too—of poor old Lofty perhaps. Who could tell what he was thinking?

As Copper looked at him, he saw the fingers of his hand curl into a clenched fist.

Three months later, on a wild November night, McGill was keeping the middle watch as a lookout on the bridge of the destroyer, now engaged in convoy escort duties in the North Atlantic. His eyes, long practised in detecting the dim blackness of a pack of wigeon or a party of Brents on a dark night, easily picked up the row of black lumps which were the ships in the starboard wing column of the convoy.

It was very cold. The gale howled in the foremast rigging and spray burst from time to time over the bridge, rapping viciously on the screen and on the sou'wester tops of the men who ducked to avoid the full lash of it.

Suddenly there was a dull explosion.

"See anything, port lookout?" asked the Officer of the Watch.

"No, sir." Thick scurry of rain and sleet obliterated even the black lumps of the convoy.

"You heard an explosion, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir," said McGill.

The Officer of the Watch moved to the voice pipe. "Captain, sir."

A sleepy voice answered him.

"Explosion, sir. I think it was a torpedo."

The Captain reached the bridge in time to see the rocket signals, dim and blurred through the rain, which confirmed that

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a U-boat had attacked the convoy. He thought, What a night for it, with this sea and these squalls and wind. The U-boat's bound to get away with it. The enemy was developing surface attack at night in these early days of the Battle of the Atlantic, when the issue lay in the balance.

A hunt was carried out and many depth charges were dropped, with unknown result. McGill heard and felt their explosion almost unmoved. He was at his Action Station now at A gun. Great seas washed constantly over the deck, but he crouched to leeward of the foc'sle screen trying to keep dry. At any moment a torpedo might be running towards them—at this moment it might have started . . . or at this . . . He was not at all afraid.

The air was full of salt mist.

About an hour after the torpedo struck the Captain received orders from the Senior Officer of the escort to stand by the sinking ship. She was on fire.

McGill could see her through the rain as a big nebulous ball of orange fire. Below this the haze of spume was thick over the angry wave tops.

The destroyer crept up to leeward of the wreck and lay no more than half a cable away, rolling wildly in the trough of the sea. Her ten-inch searchlight swept the intervening blackness and lit upon a boat, low in the water and packed with men. It looked stark and white in the beam, the faces shining up into the light through the mist.

McGill heard the thin pipe of the Bosun's Mate above the howling of the wind, followed by a shouted order, " A and B guns' crews muster in the port waist."

That meant him, that meant a job to do. Up till now it had all seemed far away, someone else's responsibility in which he could only stand and watch, shivering with cold and a vague detached excitement. Now there would be work for him, and he suddenly realised the strength of his burning longing to help—to help those blank white faces clustered together in fear—to get them at all costs, every one of them.

There was a crowd round the fo'csle ladder, filing down to the port waist, and when he reached the iron deck the boat was nearer, but it was also lower in the water—it was almost waterlogged. The wave tops were slopping over the gunwale.

McGill heard the sharp crack of a rifle shot, and a thin white line appeared in the searchlight's beam. The line-throwing gun had been fired over the boat, the thin cord flying out in a low arc. But the wind blew it away like gossamer, far astern.

McGill looked up to the pom-pom deck, where the Gunner's Mate was reloading the rifle. Presently he saw the figure poised,

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ready to fire again; then came the crack and a second line sped out far ahead of the boat to make allowance for the wind. For a moment it hung in the air, then slipped sideways in the clutch of the gale.

The men in the boat reached upwards, lurching, but it passed over their heads.

"Heaving-lines!" shouted the Petty Officer, who was in charge of the party waiting on the iron deck. "Hey you, McGill, get a heaving-line, chop-chop!"

Swinging from one handhold to the next, McGill made for the foc'sle where the heaving-lines were kept in the foc'sle caboose. He knocked off the clips and opened the door, closing it quickly just before the next wave broke over the foc'sle.

In less than a minute he was back on the iron deck with a line, the specially-weighted one with a brass nut inside the turk's-head at its end.

The boat was much closer now. He gauged the distance and thought: I can just throw it that far. All the time he was coiling the line on his left arm, ready to heave it.

When he was ready the Petty Officer said, "Don't throw yet," but McGill had gone far away into a world where his own capabilities were finely drawn like silver point. Far away and far ahead too.

He could see the men in the boat reaching up to catch his line; he could see them hauling over the heavier grass line that was now being flaked along the deck behind him; he could see the boat alongside and see the men being rescued, hauled up to safety.

It would all be done—if he could throw it that far. Just that far.

He swung back, and with a great bowling action cast the coils out, aiming just ahead of the boat. The line spread itself smoothly, and the weighted end, falling like a trout fly, lipped the gunwale.

A strange murmur, half heard above the roar of the storm, ran through the cluster of men at the guard rail. Now they could help. "Ah—now then," they said.

The grass rope's end was bent to the heaving-line and passed outboard as the men in the waterlogged boat hauled in. At last it reached them and was secured.

McGill watched the boat being dragged towards the destroyer in angry jerks. Every time the ship rolled away the grass rope came taut, and when it rolled towards her they took down the slack and held on for the jerk. It was an unseamanlike method, but the First Lieutenant was giving the orders.

McGill could only gaze at the scene with fierce intensity, every muscle braced, ready to move when the opportunity came, to do

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anything he was told, or anything he saw that needed doing. He had never been so ready in his life, not even on those wild nights landing on the rocks of Chapel Island, or driving up the lough with the tiny sail which overcanvassed the duck-punt to the point of breathless danger.

It was raining harder now, and with the squall the wind was whipped to new fury. The boat and the crowd on the tumbling destroyer's deck and the thick atmosphere of rain and spray were all lit by the pinkish-orange glow of the burning ship in the background.

Amidships she was a furnace, high flames leaping from the bridge and flickering from the ventilator cowls. The plating of the superstructure was already red-hot. The hot pungent smell of burning blew down across the destroyer's decks in occasional waves: a stifling, menacing smell.

The crowded boat was nearly alongside now, heavy and sluggish in the great seas. About twenty men sat upright on the thwarts, and lines were being passed to them to haul her alongside the special clambering net which hung down the destroyer's side. Faces below were upturned, arms reaching already for the net, some of the men crouching, some standing.

McGill saw other figures in the boat down in the water, floating—swilling sickeningly back and forth with the rolling of the boat. Why didn't they pull them out of the water, give them a chance?

With a splintering crack the boat came alongside. A dozen jumped for the net and hung on. The destroyer rolled away and they were dangling against the ship's side far above their boat. Then she rolled back; the water came up to meet them, and in a moment they were in it. The boat was caught by a wave and swept again towards the ship's side.

McGill saw what would happen, saw it helplessly, agonised. He shouted, " Look out, now," like most of the others watching, but it was too late.

The men in the water also saw, saw the boat high above them on the crest of the wave.

A terrible shout of despair that was almost a scream came up to the watchers and was blown away into the wild clamour of the night.

Then the boat crashed against the ship's side for the second time—a muffled crash as the human fenders took the blow.

At that instant McGill suddenly moved, his heart beating high, his brain crystal clear, his purpose defined. If he had felt fear at all that night, no trace remained to cross his mind. There were men in the water, helpless, injured, drowning; men who were

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within reach of safety but slipping away. It was for this he had been waiting—for just such a chance.

He took off his duffel coat and climbed through the guard rails and down the clambering net, past the survivors who were struggling upwards. A moment later he was on the gunwale of the boat which still bumped and crashed against the ship's side.

Floating near the stern was a limp body. He seized hold of the kapok lifejacket and began to heave the man back into the boat.

In a moment he was being helped, and he heard the rich north-country voice of Ordinary Seaman Money in his ear. "That's the stuff, lad. In with 'im!"

"Get the other chap," McGill said. He hauled the heavy man into the boat and propped him against the thwart, then turned and helped Copper with the second.

He had never been so strong, he could do anything. It was dangerous the way the boat crashed against the ship—oh yes, it was dangerous, but he was nimble enough to avoid the danger if he kept on his toes. The boat would break up soon so they must hurry, but he could be quick and strong, never so strong.

With a mighty heave the second man slithered into the boat.

Two more hands were on the clambering net now, and coming down to help. Heaving-lines were passed and bowlines made round the bodies. Besides the crushed there were the three floating in the bottom of the boat who might yet be saved by artificial respiration. As they tied the bowlines, and struggled to lift the heavy burdens, willing hands reached down from the deck when the boat came up on a crest and dragged them on board.

"Below there," came the First Lieutenant's voice. "There's a fellow floating just clear of your stern there—can you get him?"

McGill saw him in the light of a torch from above, about five yards away, a white lifeless face above the lifejacket, almost as much under the water as above it. But there was a chance!

He slipped over the side and struck out for him.

It was breathtakingly cold, even though he had been wet through before, but it was easy now, no effort to try out his strength. His breath came in sharp gasps, the wavelets slapped into his face, half blinding him, but ahead he could still make out the white half-bald head, the thin hair washed flat across the dead face.

As soon as he reached him and started to pull him back, a rope landed in the water beside him. He grabbed it and together they were hauled towards the boat.

"All right, I've got him," said Copper. The drowned man

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was heaved first into the boat where the line was secured, then up the ship's side where the helpers clung to the upper meshes of the net to take the weight on the way up.

McGill was feeling so strong that he scarcely needed Copper's assistance to get back into the boat. He got a knee into the looped lifeline that ran round below the gunwale, and landed spluttering on one of the thwarts.

Copper said, " That's the stuff, lad! "

The other two men shouted, " Come on now—that's the lot." They all jumped for the net and climbed it as fast as they could. Below them, the boat pounded again with a splintering crash, its last frustrated effort to crush them. At the top they were engulfed in the crowd.

" All right—let the boat go—cut the grass as far down as you can." The First Lieutenant was giving the orders. He turned to go up on to the bridge. " Well done, Chapman—and you, Piggott. Who else was down there? Oh, well done, Money! You'd better go forrad and get your things off."

The Bosun's Mate came up to him. " From the Captain, sir, He thinks there's a man still on the ship. He says will you speak to him about it at once, sir."

A man on the ship. A man trapped there in that burning hell. The group stood gazing, and McGill, dripping and shivering, stood with them.

As they watched, a torch flickered at the stern of the ship.

The First Lieutenant came back and spoke to the Petty Officer. " The survivors say that there may be two men still on the poop there. The Captain wants us to float a Carley raft away on the grass line. We're drifting so fast that it will float upwind to them quite quickly . . . No, no one's to go in it. We'll use No. 4 raft; better slip it at once."

McGill heard all this; heard and understood it. But why was no one to go in it? With someone in it the trapped men could throw down a line from their quarter which could be caught on the raft. Otherwise it was pure chance if the raft went within their reach.

These were the sort of things that McGill knew—much more than he knew about sounding machines, carpenters' stoppers, and the breaking strains of cables, and all the other things you were meant to know in the Navy. The very fact that he knew and understood it was a challenge. Being cold and wet made the effort harder, until the challenge was irresistible. He was exultantly ready to do much more than his share.

The raft was slipped and fell with a big flat splash into the smoky blackness below.

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McGill followed quickly to the guard rail, climbed through and seized hold of the grass rope. Then he slid down into the sea and worked his way along to the raft at the far end of it. The water was desperately cold; much colder than before. He climbed eagerly on to the raft. Already it was drifting away from the destroyer's side; or rather the destroyer was being blown away from the raft, which floated low in the water, waves breaking over its rounded end. The centre of the oval raft formed a sort of basket, with its bottom in the water like a gigantic fisherman's keep net.

McGill sat on the cylinder with his feet in the basket, submerged to the knees. As he sat, he was suddenly seized with panic. Little feathers of spray burst over him. All at once he was tired and weak: his muscles went stiff, he was utterly alone in the dark ocean between the two ships.

The weakness and the fear held him in a tight grip so that his stomach ached sickeningly. Now he would surely die, and for such stupidity, such stupidity, such mad vanity! People could not live long like that—all wet and exposed. He would be washed off the raft soon. Exposure—people died of it, he had heard about it. They went numb. Someone had said it was a comfortable, easy death, once you were numb. What nonsense some people did talk.

" Don't get above yourself," his mother used to say. That was not nonsense. But this that he was doing was nonsense—folly—madness. Only Tim would understand why he had started out.

Tim *would* understand. Like that night by Mount Stewart there, when they went on for the baits after the tide had turned just to show they weren't frightened. Well, now it was all over; he would surely die, surely.

The sea's ruffled blackness was velvet, the cloak of death.

" Is that a man in the raft? " called the First Lieutenant, as they payed out the grass line from the iron deck.

" Yes, sir," answered the Petty Officer.

" Who is it? "

" I'm not sure, sir. I think it's McGill."

Half a dozen voices confirmed it.

" I said no one was to go."

" I never saw him go, sir." And then, after a pause, " He was the first man down into the boat, sir, and swam to get that drowned fellow afterwards. Seems a good lad, sir, in an emergency, as you might say."

The grass line floated away to the black outline that was only occasionally visible when a wave crest lifted it against the glow of the flames beyond. The raft was certainly working towards the

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bows. With the fire amidships there was no chance of the trapped men reaching it there.

The First Lieutenant went up to the bridge.

"Everything going all right, No. 1?" asked the Captain.

"Well—yes, sir. Actually, sir, there's a man gone over in the raft."

"I said no one was to go. Who is it?"

"Ordinary Seaman McGill, sir."

"Yeoman, shine the ten-inch on the raft."

In the beam of the searchlight, the little raft and the figure perched at one end looked very white shining out of the mist of spray. The figure was moving—swaying rhythmically.

"What the hell's he doing? Paddling?"

"Yes, sir."

Paddles were kept lashed to the floor of each raft. With one of these McGill was trying as hard as he could to work himself towards the stern of the sinking ship, so that as it drifted down on him he would come up against it on the sternward side of the midship blaze.

The exercise was warming him and with the warmth his strength returned. The grass rope was not floating and acted as an anchor to the raft, but every inch was worth the effort. He felt much better and despised his fear. He was well in the lee of the burning ship, and the spray was not breaking over him so much, but the pungent burning smell filled his nostrils.

He was out of breath soon but he saw that he had gained a few yards and paddled on with a second wind. He was very near the other ship now—close above, the fire raged. He could feel the heat of it, like the heat of a summer sun; oh, the deadly sweet taste of exhaustion and the fear of it! Then, from aft, he heard a thin faint cry. At the same moment the coils of a rope splashed down near him.

He reached out with the paddle but it was too far and he wondered whether he should jump in and fetch it. He decided to let them throw again, and at the second throw the line fell across the raft.

At once he made it fast and the raft was hauled towards the ship. The great stern fell with a thunderous slap and then rose high above him so that rudder and screw were clear of the water; the foam boiled around them as the ship pitched back. There was a Jacob's ladder hanging from the poop. If the raft was to reach the foot of the ladder, it would lie dangerously close to that plunging propeller, but there it would have to go. With the great waves the raft rose and fell past twenty or more rungs of the ladder.

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One of the men had already started down, very slowly and hesitantly.

When he was a little more than halfway McGill shouted, " Stay there now, and jump next time I come up to you."

The man obeyed, and when McGill said, " Now, jump! " he waited for about three seconds, and then jumped and missed. McGill reached out for him and pulled him into the middle of the raft; he sat on the edge, coughing.

It was darker now because they were shaded from the fire by the bulk of the stern. The searchlight had been doused, but even in the dark McGill saw at once that he had rescued a boy no older than himself. The boy was very frightened; he was sobbing with cold and fear, between fits of coughing.

This discovery made McGill feel suddenly old and competent and strong. With an effort he overcame the chatter of his teeth. " It's all right," he said, " we'll be back safe directly." He did not doubt that it was true, and he found that it encouraged him a lot to say it.

The second man was coming down now. As he came a huge wave lifted the ship's stern high out of the water, showing again the rudder and the propeller.

McGill thought, What if a bight of the grass line should catch under the propeller, or a loop go under the rudder? It would pull the raft down. He thought, It will do, it is bound to; and then it will really be the end.

He clambered along the raft and saw how the grass rope ran steeply down now into the water. It had sunk deep and the ship was drifting down on it. He tried to haul some of it in. " Hey, give me a hand! "

But the boy did not move, he held on with both hands, too frightened to help. McGill had to give up. If the raft was pulled down, they would drown. There was nothing he could do. He was quite resigned.

The second man stepped off neatly into the raft. He was frightened too.

" Are there any more? " McGill shouted.

" No," he heard the man say. " No, we're the last."

With his knife he cut the rope which hung from the bulwarks far above. All that now remained was for the destroyer's men to haul them back the few hundred yards which separated the two ships. That was all, if the rope was not foul of the derelict. But how could they know in the destroyer that the raft was ready? McGill shouted, " Heave in," but the sound was drowned instantly in the fury of the night.

Then he remembered the flickering torch.

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" Have you still got your torch? " he asked.

The man fumbled in his pocket and produced it. " It's pretty well finished," he said.

McGill took it and flashed once or twice. Then pressing on the button without pushing it forward he started to signal, out of the far-off memories of the training establishment. H—that was four dots; E—oh, E was easy, just one dot; and then A—a dot and a dash; V—that was difficult, he paused and then made a B—a dash and three dots instead of three dots and a dash; then E again. At the end of the word he had to wait to see if it had been read.

No answering flash came from the destroyer's bridge.

The torch was almost spent, showing only a dull amber light. He made the word all over again, but he was sure they could not see it.

And then suddenly a point of light showed on the bridge. T, it said, which meant that it had understood. IN was easy to make: I—two dots, and N the opposite of A—a dash and a dot. The light answered again, paused, then fluttered quickly, far too quickly for him to read, but he guessed it meant that they had understood.

The man and the boy sat very still, clutching the rope strops of the raft. The boy was shivering; his breath came in quick sobs.

McGill climbed along to the other end of the raft and watched the grass rope which hung vertically under it. Suddenly, he looked up and noticed they were away from the ship's side, and at the same time he determined that the grass rope was not quite so vertical as it had been; it sloped away towards the destroyer; it was *not* round the screw of the wreck. They were being hauled back.

" Won't be long now," he said quite cheerfully.

The man looked at McGill, for the first time aware that he was only a boy. He saw his black hair tangled across his forehead, and the glint of the fire shining in his eyes; he saw his shoulders hunched and shivering, and the thinness of him. " Good," he answered through clenched teeth.

McGill sat quite still, gazing back at the burning wreck.

" Look! " he said suddenly.

Her back had broken and her two black ends were rising up. While they watched there came an awful hissing roar as the water boiled up and quenched the red-hot plates. There was a muffled explosion and a great shower of sparks burst out of the centre of the fire. A pall of billowy smoke shone blood-red for a moment, and then faded as the blaze was drowned. The stern

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and bows rose majestically into the air, almost touching as the ship folded in half. Then, quite silently, she slid down behind the black mountain of an intervening wave.

When next the raft rose upon a crest, nothing remained but a flicker of flame burning on the sea's surface. It flared for a moment and went out.

McGill looked back to the destroyer, a dim shape in the new darkness. He was utterly unmoved by the final plunge of the sinking ship. Too much had happened already. He was past caring about anything, numbed with awful cold and fatigue.

They came halfway down the net to pull the three of them from the raft. They had to hold McGill up and help him along to the mess deck. Copper was on one side of him. "Ee—that's the stuff, lad," he said.

They helped him off with his sodden clothes and rubbed him down with towels, and someone brought him a steaming cup of cocoa with too much sugar in it. The First Lieutenant was there some of the time, saying something about it being a good show.

McGill was too tired to remember it all. They wrapped him in blankets, and bundled him into his hammock. A rich glow came into his body and he curled his hands up to his face.

"Oh, Tim," he said to his brother, "it was all right this time, wasn't it?"

A moment later, he was asleep.

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★ **Peter Scott,** *well-known author, painter, ornithologist, TV and radio personality, lives in Gloucestershire at the famous Wildfowl Trust, for which, as its director and founder, he was made C.B.E. in 1953.*

He is the son of Scott of the Antarctic, and is married, with three children.

His wartime service was multifarious: he volunteered for the Navy in 1939, flew with R.A.F. bombing raids in 1942, later joined Light Coastal Forces, and took part in the Dieppe Raid and the Normandy invasion. His camouflage scheme was adopted by the Admiralty.

He has explored and travelled in most parts of the world, from Lapland to Fiji, in search of rare birds and animals. His books focus mainly on birds—remember "Morning Flight"?—and his illustrations for bird books, such as Paul Gallico's "Snow Goose," are famous. He has also written "Battle of the Narrow Seas." This story is his first piece of fiction, based on wartime experience. Hobbies: sailing, gliding, anything connected with air, water, or birds.

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

THE KING IN PAWN

" Go to a lawyer ? " said Albert.
" Throw good money after bad ? "

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE QUEEN'S Own Royal South London Rifles has its depot in Southwark High Street and has long recruited both its regular and territorial regiments from the young toughs who live thereabouts. How Detective Inspector Petrella became an honorary member of this excellent regiment and a welcome guest at its functions is a story which has never been fully or truthfully told.

It started on a blustery evening in March. It had been a tiresome day. There had been a case of shoplifting, rendered more unpleasant than usual by the fact that children had been trained to do the stealing; there had been three larcenies from parked cars, a case of organised pocket-picking in a bus queue and, that the measure should be pressed down and overflowing, a little matter of defalcation from the police canteen at Gabriel Street itself.

" Is everyone incurably dishonest ? " said Petrella to Superintendent Benjamin.

" Lucky the canteen fiddle wasn't one of our boys," said Benjamin. " I never trusted that civilian caterer."

" Most of the people we've had in today didn't need the money. Not really need it. Those dreadful women, smoking like chimneys, dressed up to the nines, training their own kids to lift stuff— "

" Opportunity," said Benjamin, " makes crime. Cut down the opportunities, you'll cut the crime. You know who I'd like to put inside, Patrick ? Receivers. Shut one of them up and you stop a hundred crimes that haven't been committed."

Petrella had heard all this before and knew it to be true. But it had been too hard a day for easy optimism.

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"Receivers are like the hydra," he said. "Cut off one head, and a hundred more spring up."

"Little men," said Benjamin. "You're talking about little men. People who'll hide a carton of stolen cigarettes in the wash-tub and sweat every time the doorbell goes. I'm not talking about little men, Patrick. I'm talking about the two or three who matter. You know you did your best job the first month you were here, when you ran old Bonny. Pick up the King, and you can claim your pension."

Pick up the King, thought Petrella, as he left Gabriel Street that evening. He had one more call to make, in the Pardoe Street area, and then he was going home. Pick up the King. It sounded easy, when you said it. And some day, no doubt, somebody would do it. Even the smartest criminals made a mistake in the end. But the King had had a very long run.

His name had been spoken in South London for twenty years or more. It had been whispered among informers, the little spreading grass roots of the underworld.

The King was older than the oldest detective in X Division. He dealt in jewellery, in precious stones, and metals of all sorts. So much was known.

A man who pulled a job of this sort had only to wait for a telephone call. Sooner or later it would come. Be at a certain place at a certain time. The place was somewhere, anywhere, in south London. The time was after dark. A car would draw up, a gloved hand hold out a packet of notes. The same hand would receive the parcel of stolen goods. The car would drive off.

There was no pause to check the jewellery; no time to count the notes. Each side trusted the other because, in the long run, it paid them to do so. Just once, soon after the war ended, Big Lewis had the idea of substituting a packet of inferior stones for the diamonds he had lifted from Curlier's. The real diamonds he had retained at home under a loose tile in the kitchen, with an eye to disposing of them subsequently at even greater profit. When he got home he found three plain-clothes men waiting for him. They knew about the loose tile, too. The King was as quick as that.

It was from Big Lewis, who realised he had been shopped, that the police had most of their information about the King. It amounted to precious little. It was clearly a waste of time trying to trace him through the cars he used, for these would be "borrowed" from a car park, and returned without the owners ever being aware of the use to which their property had been put. It was a method which left remarkably few loose ends.

The name itself might have some significance. In the curious

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warped humour of the underworld names might have two or even three meanings. (Had there not been another famous receiver known as Treble Eleven, who turned out to be a middle-aged paperseller, a woman named Poppy?)

Petrella had his own ideas about the King. He thought maybe they were dealing with a dynasty. Not one King, but a line of Kings. The stock-in-trade of such a man was knowledge. Knowing who would be likely to pull certain jobs. Knowing the disgruntled deckhands and too-clever airline operatives who would carry the stuff out of the country; knowing the buyers in Paris and Amsterdam; knowing how to get the end money back to England. When the reigning King had made his pile, what was to prevent him disposing of this knowhow to a carefully chosen successor?

"A hydra," said Petrella. "A dynasty of hydras."

It was at this point in his reflections that a heavy brass ashtray came sailing through a window close to his right cheek, covered him with splintered glass, ricocheted from a lamp post and came to rest in the gutter with a sullen clang.

Petrella shook the glass carefully out of his raincoat while he considered the matter.

The window through which the ashtray had come belonged, he saw, to the private bar of a small public house, the Kentish Giant. He was aware of raised voices and stamping feet within. There came a further crash, a progression of crashes as though a child was dragging the cloth off a dinner table laid for twelve.

Petrella opened the door and looked inside.

The fight was almost over.

In the middle of the room a subsiding group was composed of a stout man in shirtsleeves, a youth in an apron, a man in a blue suit, and a man in denim overalls. All of them were holding on to outlying portions of a a fifth man, a large man with a red face, a shock of close-cropped hair, and a morosely pugnacious expression.

The large man heaved like a balloon at its guide ropes. His captors held firm. A steady flow of obscenity rose from all five; rose, mingled, and ascended with the dust of their stamping.

Petrella stepped cautiously past the overturned table and through the litter of broken glasses on the floor.

"Lay off, now," said the stout man in shirtsleeves. "Lay off, do you hear, or we'll do you proper."

The red-faced man said an unprintable word and stamped on the stout man's toe. The group swayed dangerously.

"Stop it!" said Petrella.

The note of authority was unmistakable. He added formally,

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"I'm a detective inspector, and I shall have to take you—" he addressed the red-faced man—"into custody for occasioning a breach of the peace."

"You take him right away," agreed the man in shirtsleeves. "Come in here, busting up my place, eh?"

"That's right," said the youth. It seemed to be the general view.

Petrella said, "Come with me."

The man, unconstrained but unsupported, swayed on his feet and blinked at him.

"Right away," said Petrella. He stepped up close, seized the man's forearm just above the elbow, and started to push. Surprisingly, the man came.

There was no reason for him to do so. By any computation he was stronger and bigger than Petrella. But the fight seemed to be out of him. All the same, Petrella was relieved to meet a pair of patrolling policemen at the first corner.

He went with them to Southwark Police Station and saw to the formalities. The red-faced man, who gave his name as Albert Porter, retired to the cells.

Petrella went home.

Before he went into Court next morning, he found time for a word with the landlord of the Kentish Giant.

"Albert's all right," said the landlord. "Generally, he's quite all right. I've known him for years. So have the boys. Don't know what came over him last night."

The landlord's son said, "Before he started busting the place up he was on about that business of his, you know, the garage."

"I heard he'd been led up the old garden path," said the landlord. "Something he put his money into when he came out of the army. Maybe that's what set him off. I expect that was it. Funny thing, I've known it happen before. Like Jock Andrews. Lost his wife, brooded over it. Came in about a month later, had a couple of pints—not more than a couple of pints—and started breaking up the happy home."

Petrella steered the conversation back to Albert Porter.

"He was in the South Londons," said the landlord's son. "Company Sergeant Major. *My* Sergeant Major."

His voice had the disillusion of youth misled. Petrella sympathised with him. A tragedy in the Greek fashion. The godlike figure of the parade ground and the barrack hut reduced to a red-faced, brawling nuisance.

"He had his troubles," said the landlord, "like I said. Came out two years ago when they were thinning 'em out and paying

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'em off. Officers and N.C.O.s. Albert took what was coming to him and put it in a garage. Diddun turn out well."

"I see," said Petrella. It seemed to him a remote reason for breaking up a friendly public house. "You'll probably both have to give evidence."

"Wooden want to do that," said the landlord.

Fortunately there was no need for anyone to give evidence.

Albert Porter, revived by his night in the cells and spruced up in a way known only to ex-sergeant majors, stood four-square in the box and pleaded guilty.

Petrella told his story, leaning heavily on the side of mitigation, and the prisoner was bound over.

Petrella caught up with him as he was leaving the court and said, "Come and have a cup of tea. I want to hear about your garage."

Mr. Porter looked at Petrella doubtfully, then grunted and said, "I've told so many people about it, another can't hurt, I suppose."

"I'll pay for the tea," said Petrella. "You talk."

It was a sad story, but not a new one. Ex-Sergeant Major Porter, with two thousand pounds burning a hole in his pocket, had met Mr. Morris. Mr. Morris was a respectable citizen. At fifty yards on a foggy night he was still a respectable citizen. A pillar of an unspecified church, a member of the local Chamber of Commerce. The source of Mr. Morris' wealth and respectability was the Rampart Garage.

"The Rampart?" said Petrella. "Yes, of course I know it. Corner of Buckingham Road. I've often stopped there for a couple of gallons myself."

"It's a lovely business," said Porter. "No fooling, a lovely business. Big repair shed. Lot of concessions for branded goods. Steady oil and petrol sales. Ol' Morris said he was aiming to get out gradually. Offered me a quarter share for two thousand pounds *and* a job. I've done a lot of work on engines. I started life in the R.E.M.E. It seemed to be just the job."

"So you paid down your money," said Petrella, "without getting a lawyer or an accountant to vet the proposition first, and you discovered the snag when it was too late to do anything about it. Right?"

Mr. Porter nodded.

"What *was* the snag, by the way?"

"It's going to be pulled down. Road widening."

"I see. All the same—" Petrella considered. "If the local authority acquire the site and pull down the garage, they'll have to

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pay compensation. Good compensation. You'll get a quarter of that."

"Not me. The bank's got a mortgage on the place. For more than the compensation."

"What about all the gear?"

"The pumps and stuff belong to the oil company. They've got a mortgage on the place, too; there's an awful lot of other stuff but I doubt if it'll fetch a thousand pounds at knockdown prices."

"I see," said Petrella.

"The site's the real value of the place. The site and the connection. Once they've gone, there's nothing left. I paid two thousand pounds for nothing. That's the short and the long of it. And there's nothing anyone can do about it."

"Maybe," said Petrella. "Maybe not."

He spent half an hour that afternoon with a dry but helpful little man in the office of the local planning authority, who unrolled the planning map and confirmed that the Rampart Garage was indeed due to disappear.

"The real trouble," he said, "is Palace Crescent. It's residential, and packed with private cars. That means there's a constant flow of traffic where we least want it—here." He put his thumb down, a modern Roman Emperor condemning a full arena. "Where it runs out into the main road. And the garage is right on the corner. It is the corner site."

"That's right," said Petrella. "That's what makes it such a marvellous place for a garage."

"It'll be a year or more before we get going on that bit. And when we do acquire it, your friend will get compensation."

"Nothing like enough, I'm afraid," said Petrella.

He said it absentmindedly. For an idea had come to him. A wild, splendid, mad idea. An idea of curious ramifications and infinite possibilities; and he wanted time to look at it.

He made some excuses, got out of the Council offices, and walked back in the direction of the Rampart Garage.

A café across the street offered a handy observation point. He took a cup of tea to a table by the window. Business at the garage was brisk. In the first half-hour he counted twenty cars in and out.

The petrol pumps, which Albert was serving, stood in a forecourt at the point of the angle made by the two roads. Behind them stood the garage block, with a main drive-in entrance for cars, and a glass door on the right leading to an office. Behind that again was an area of repair shops. The whole thing was one of those confused, casual, but workable jumbles calculated to infuriate any right-minded planner.

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At the end of the half-hour his patience was rewarded. The office door opened and Mr. Morris came out. Petrella felt sure that it was Mr. Morris: a man of about sixty-five, stocky, bright-eyed, rosy-cheeked, sporting a short but aggressive white beard. He stood for a moment, eyeing the hurrying traffic as his Norse ancestor might have stood at the prow of his long-boat, surveying potential victims.

He said something to Albert. They still seemed to be on friendly terms. Petrella was surprised at this, but reflected that in Albert's place he would probably have done the same. The closer he stuck to the garage, the closer he stayed by his own two thousand pounds.

It was at this point that the idea he had had earlier on was enlarged. It ceased to be nebulous, and became concrete. He paid his bill and went back to Gabriel Street.

"Go to a lawyer?" said Albert. "Throw good money after bad? I ought to have gone to one to start with, there I agree with you. But it can't do any good now. He hasn't broken any law that I know of."

"Try it," said Petrella.

"Don't know any lawyers."

"I know lots," said Petrella. He considered the solicitors with whom he had had dealings, and selected Mr. Trapper as most appropriate to this problem. "And what's more I'll come with you."

"You think it'll do any good?"

"I've got an idea. Until we've talked it over with someone who knows the ropes, I can't tell if it's any good or not."

"Might as well try it," said Albert.

Mr. Trapper had an office near the Oval cricket ground. He was big, heavy, full-jowled and had hair so strong and so black that he never looked properly shaved. He called Petrella "Patrick," greeted Albert kindly, listened to his story, and perused the contents of the envelope of papers that he had brought along with him.

"He certainly did the thing in style," said Mr. Trapper. "That's old Morris who owns the Rampart, isn't it? Chap with a beard. Looks like a regular old pirate."

"All I can say is, it looked all right at the time," said Albert.

"Nice little business, I should have said. What's the catch? Oh, planning trouble."

Petrella explained about the planning trouble. Mr. Trapper listened to him carefully, but continued reading the papers at the same time, a facility that busy lawyers seem to acquire.

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"Hullo," he said. "What's this? You didn't tell me he'd given you a debenture on the place."

Albert took the proffered document cautiously and said, "That's right. A debenture. A sort of mortgage, isn't it?"

"Yes and no," said Mr. Trapper. "It's a mortgage in so far as it gives you a charge on the place. Well, that's not much good because the bank and the petrol company have got charges in front of you, if you follow me?"

"In a way," said Mr. Porter.

"But it gives you other remedies, as well. For instance, this entitles you to six per cent on your money, payable monthly. Have you had that?"

"What I get from Morris is my wages. Twelve pounds a week, and he takes the P.A.Y.E. off himself before he pays 'em."

"In that case," said Mr. Trapper, folding his massive black hairy hands on the desk, "your debenture interest is clearly in arrears. You should at once appoint a receiver."

The word hung in the dusty office.

"A receiver?" said Petrella.

"Not the sort of receiver you're thinking of, Patrick. A legal receiver. Any debenture holder or mortgagee has that remedy."

"What does a receiver do?"

"He takes charge," said Mr. Trapper briskly. "His authority will be supported, if necessary, by the Court. He receives all rents, controls the bank account, runs the business, makes an inventory of the stock, and he arranges for periodical checks and audits."

"Can he exclude the proprietor?"

"If it was the proprietor who granted the debenture, certainly. It might be his duty to exclude him. Prevent him tampering with assets."

"Do you—" as Petrella spoke-he was conscious of a fierce and unhallowed joy as his idea fulfilled itself—"do you *know* any receivers?"

"Oh, dozens of 'em. Accountants mostly. I think Bowles would be the man for you here."

"How do we appoint him?"

"Just sign a document I'll draw up for you. What's today? Friday. I'll get Bowles on the telephone. Give him a day to get organised. I suggest he goes in on Monday."

"Mr. Morris is rather an explosive personality," said Petrella. "He might try to make things a bit hot for Mr. Bowles. You'd better warn him."

"Bowles is quite capable of looking after himself," said Mr. Trapper.

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On Monday morning, as was his custom, Mr. Morris arrived at the Rampart Garage at nine o'clock sharp. Petrella had been at his observation post in the café for half an hour. He wanted to see the curtain go up.

The first big moment arrived when Mr. Morris found that the office door was not only locked, but apparently bolted, too. He walked round and put his nose up against the window, from which a light was showing. Then he rapped on the window and shouted something through it.

Petrella paid his bill, went out, crossed the street higher up, and drifted back towards the garage. As he reached the corner, the door was opened and a tall thin man, wearing steel spectacles, peered out.

"Are you Mr. Morris?" he inquired.

"That's right. I am," said Mr. Morris. "And who the flaming something or other are you?"

"My name," said the tall man severely, "is Bowles. I am a receiver, placed in possession of the premises by your debenture-holder, Mr. Porter. This is a copy of the instrument appointing me. The original has been filed with the Registrar of Companies."

Mr. Morris made a monosyllabic and, on the whole, improbable suggestion about the Registrar of Companies.

"If you have any proper communication to make," said Mr. Bowles, "might I suggest you make it in writing?" He started to close the door again. Mr. Morris got his foot into it.

"You let me in at once," he said, "or I'll call a policeman. Keeping a man out of his own office."

"There is a policeman on the corner," said Mr. Bowles. "In fact, I fancy he is coming this way now."

Petrella withdrew discreetly. He was inclined to agree with Mr. Trapper that Bowles could look after himself.

So began the siege of the Rampart.

It lasted, in all, for three days. Petrella saw some of it, and heard the rest from Albert who continued to serve oil and petrol to customers unconscious of the drama that was being played around them.

The policeman had apparently decided in favour of Mr. Bowles. Mr. Morris had withdrawn, no doubt to consult his own solicitor. Not finding much comfort in the law, he had decided on a dawn attack, and had arrived, on Tuesday morning, at eight o'clock. Anticipating this, Mr. Bowles had arrived at half past seven.

In the lunch interval Mr. Morris had sought out Albert.

"Really very nice to me, too," said Albert. "Stood me my lunch, and all. Of course, I told him it wasn't in my hands, really. He ought to approach me through my solicitors. Then he said

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some things about solicitors. Would have done you good to hear him."

"Keep it up," said Petrella. He thought for a moment and added, "I'll tell you what. Suggest to Bowles that he ought to start making an inventory. All the old stuff in that repair shop and the store shed."

"It'd take him a month of Sundays."

"I don't think he'll actually have to do it. But let Mr. Morris hear about it. Tell him that Bowles has been asking you for the keys of the different lockers and boxes. Tell him that if he doesn't get them, he's going to start breaking them open. I *think* that ought to do the trick."

On Wednesday, in the early afternoon, Albert telephoned Petrella.

"Worked a treat," he said. "He's going to pay up."

"I thought he might," said Petrella.

"Interest, and everything. As long as I get Bowles out by tea-time."

"Fine," said Petrella. "Of course, it won't do him a lot of good. Because if you withdraw your receiver and take your money, the bank or the petrol company could probably put him in again."

"I think he knows that," said Albert. "He's been to his lawyer, too. He doesn't seem to care. What he said was, as long as Bowles is out by tea-time, I can have my money."

"And what does Bowles say?"

"As soon as Morris has paid me, he's got to go. Of course, as you say, he might be put back again by one of the others, but it'd take a bit of time."

"All right," said Petrella. "That's fine." And he meant it.

He went round to Division and had a word with Superintendent Benjamin. "It's still a long shot," he said. "But the odds are shortening."

"Four cars," said Benjamin. "No—five. We don't want any slip-up now. One crew to block each of the roads, and one in reserve."

"We could observe from the café," said Petrella. "The proprietor's got an upstairs room he'd let us use. And a telephone—"

Much electricity was consumed that night at the Rampart Garage. From their vantage point over the way, Benjamin and Petrella could follow Mr. Morris' progress by the switching on and off of lights, from front office to back office, from back office to storeroom, from storeroom to repair shop and garage.

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"Having a regular spring clean," said Benjamin. "How long's he going to be?"

"He'll be out before daylight," said Petrella.

The superintendent acknowledged this with a grin which had very little humour in it.

At five different points in the streets outside the garage, police cars stood, parked inconspicuously—one man dozing at the wheel, one man in the back, one man alert for the signal.

It was close on two o'clock in the morning when Petrella said, "I think he's coming now, sir."

The big garage doors creaked open. The lights inside were all out now. The length of Buckingham Road lay empty under its glaring orange lamps.

For a moment Mr. Morris stood there as Petrella had seen him stand once before, head forward, white beard jutting. Then he disappeared. Sidelights came on. A big old-fashioned saloon car nosed out into the forecourt.

As Mr. Morris climbed down and went to shut the garage doors behind him, Superintendent Benjamin was talking on the telephone.

"Blue fabric four-door saloon," he said. "Coming now."

Then things started to happen; the saloon car turned right, out of the garage.

Mr. Morris saw the police car draw out at the same time to block the road, slammed his own car into reverse, turned in a savage half circle, and started up one of the side streets. He spotted the second car too late.

As Petrella ran out of the café he heard the scream of brakes and the noise of the impact.

Mr. Morris was still fighting, screaming, a high thin scream, and fighting like a lunatic with two of the patrol-car men. The sergeant stood, a dripping crimson handkerchief to his face.

"Steady," said Petrella. "Steady. He's an old man."

"He's an old bastard," said the sergeant. "Went for my eyes."

"We want him in one piece," said Petrella.

The screaming had stopped now. Mr. Morris was lying on his back on the pavement, bubbling gently and dribbling into his beard. Petrella thought that the bubbling was worse than the screaming.

Three evenings later, in the detective room at Gabriel Street, Superintendent Benjamin straightened his back and said, "That's the lot. All identified. Do you know, he had the bits and pieces of twenty different jewel robberies in that car?"

"Hidden," said Petrella, "I don't doubt, in twenty most

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ingenious places round that garage. It took him eight hours to get them all out, and *he* knew where to look."

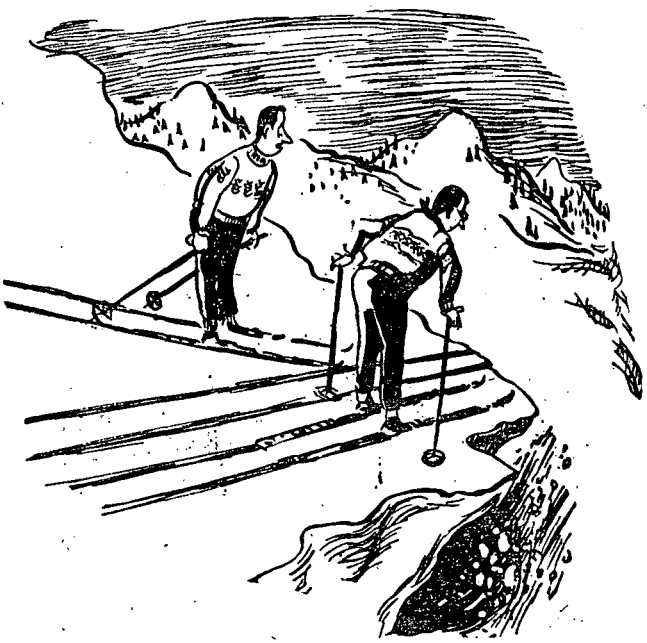
"It's magnificent," said Benjamin. He was not a man given to enthusiasm, and when he used a word like magnificent it sounded like an accolade. "There's no doubt about it. We've got our hands on the King at last. We've been so busy in the last three days I haven't even had time to ask you how you spotted him."

"Part hunch," said Petrella. "A garage owner and second-hand car man seemed just right. Plenty of excuse to keep ready money about, plenty of hiding-places, and you have to know something about cars if you're going to knock them off. But really it was the joke."

"Joke?"

"You know what they're like round here. A man living at the corner of Buckingham Road and Palace Crescent. What else *could* they call him?"

He looked at his watch and said, "I've got to run. A date with the sergeants and warrant officers of the South Londons. We're celebrating Albert's return to solvency." © Michael Gilbert 1960



"And she was just getting the hang of it."

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STRANGE NOCTURNE

All the time she had a sense that he watched her

BY RHYS DAVIES

AFTER Mrs. Pryde had finished her morning tasks in the cottage and bustled off with a list of things to be brought from the village shop the next day, Jean attempted to resume work on a watercolour of the sunlit garden.

She had run away from her husband five days before, borrowing the closed-up summer cottage from an old school friend, whose own connubial harmony still seemed to be detained in the benign interior of the friendly rooms, and the sheltered garden.

Autumn tints were attaining their first vehemence; the beech trees especially crackled with colour. Above a contrasting swarthiness of distant pinewoods there could be seen—the only habitation in view—the towers, cupola, and baroque chimneys of a Victorian mansion; from the cottage verandah they had a look of fairytale frailness.

In less than an hour Jean abandoned her work on the painting, went upstairs, and swallowed one of the capsules she had got out of her unwilling doctor in London. Within a few minutes she was fast asleep on the bed.

When she opened her eyes the October light at the lattice windows had thickened to a vivid red. Birds in the wood at the back were completing their day's transactions. For a while she lay musing her way into what seemed calm and refreshed wakefulness. Then she took out of the pocket of her cardigan an unopened letter.

It had come that morning, the only one to arrive since her flight. Sight of the beloved handwriting on the envelope had thrown her—she had had a bad night—into extraordinary irritation. Why, she raged, had he ignored her injunction not to write until she gave a sign of decision? If he thought apologies, entreaties, or explanations were going to mollify her—

She tore the letter open. It was written on a thick sheet of business paper headed with a solemn address in the City.

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Jean dear—You say," Do not write or phone," but overwrought women in tantrums are apt to rave. This note is not to retaliate with what *I* thought after reading the letter you left before this cowardly decamping, but to say—

(1) I grieve I forgot myself so far as to strike you. Since I'm not highly-strung I'm astonished at myself. Blows are primitive and, except when mentioned in law courts, futile.

(2) I've shut the flat and gone to stay with Robert and Patricia who won't blab. (Or will they?)

Anyhow, I won't write again—N.

PS. The lady you got wind of with your excessively sensitive nostrils has left London for, I believe, a cave near Taormina. My farewell gift was a hand-mirror for her to comb her blonde locks in. She was a mermaid at one time, and you know what *they* are! These are my last words—N.

Despite the calm brought by dreamless sleep, the postscript's offensive jauntiness made her rip the sheet of paper into two pieces. But, she fumed, getting off the bed, the whole letter was as superficial as that over-obvious gay charm of his.

But how the hackneyed offence of these philanderers, with its eternal jests, retained the power to wound! Betrayal and treason . . . the words had spun round her head for these last five days.

But perhaps a slap on the face was a sign of maturity in him? The startling force of the blow returned to her now; it had sent her sprawling on to a hard chaise-longue in the flat.

She put her husband's torn letter together again. Was the reference to law courts a hint of an ultimatum? The flight to this cottage, if prolonged, could be construed as desertion.

Already it meant a dilemma for him over an important dinner party arranged for the following week in the flat. Two youngish executives from the Midlands, complete with wives, were to be entertained in full pomp, and as a recently appointed junior director of his firm Neville wanted this first social assignment to be above reproach.

It could be granted that he treated his job, if nothing else, with emphatic respect. Rising from the dressing-table, she told herself she must somehow accept the bare fact that three years of marriage had failed to net this bowler-hatted, umbrella-carrying satyr who pranced off so elegantly to his city lair. What would come of this acceptance remained to be discovered.

She was tearing the letter into fragments, contemptuous of the thought that its allusions to assault and the mermaid could have a divorce court importance for herself, when the silence of the cottage was shattered.

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Someone had begun to play the piano downstairs. For a moment she stiffened in fear.

She remembered that she had left the french windows wide open. They could be seen from the front garden gate, which opened on to a lonely lane. Pedestrians and vehicles rarely used the lane; it was only a secondary approach to a distant farm, and the village lay a mile away.

Some local friend of the cottage owners must have walked in. She tiptoed out of the room. The thudding of her heart had not entirely eased; she found herself taking care to make no sound as, slowly, she went down the staircase of bare oak. It descended into a portion of a sitting-room which had been enlarged into an L shape by the demolishing of an inner wall. The piano stood in the further section, beyond the angle. She saw the visitor's back after stepping over three Persian rugs.

He was playing, and very well it seemed to her, another piece now. Sight of his pale blue jacket made her pause; she glanced instinctively at the telephone on a cabinet near her. Her eyes moved to the shaven back of the man's head, which not only looked naked but—perhaps a trick of the tumultuous sunset light—bluish, as if the scalp was icy cold.

The french windows, and the painting things on a low table just outside on the verandah, were as she had left them. She crossed the room to the verandah, in full view of the man now. He went on playing. The sunset blazed over the garden. She picked up the metal box of watercolours, shut it with a loud snap, and stood waiting outside, half turned to the room.

The piece of music came, apparently, to its appointed end; she had small knowledge of music. Then she looked fully into the room. The visitor remained seated at the piano, studiously returning her gaze.

After a moment or two of this mutual regard he opened his mouth, hesitated, and said, " It's a pleasure to play an instrument like this one. Our wheezy old upright in the Towers is suitable only for hymns and singsongs."

Not more than six yards separated them. She saw the strong, fresh-coloured face of a sturdy man of under thirty. A long ill-healed scar ran down one cheek. There were dark patches in the shine of his completely shaved scalp. The gaze of his greenish eyes was arrestingly steady. She said nothing.

She waited for some explanation of his presence. He hesitated again, then said, " I stopped at the gate. I came into the garden and looked at your painting—not very good, is it? "

Something like concern for her came into his regard as, a hand running over the keyboard, he added, " I couldn't resist this."

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His voice had the thick burr of the county; Mrs. Pryde, to a more pronounced degree, had it.

Although the explanation was unsatisfactory, her tension eased somewhat. She asked, at random, "Are you a professional pianist?"

"No." Again he hesitated and gave her an intent glance. "But I studied in Leipzig once. I intended to become a concert pianist. But my father was ruined and I had to give up."

He turned his head. "You've noticed this scar? I was slashed in a duel in Leipzig. The wound was stitched roughly and they took the catgut out too soon." He stared at her as if calculating her reaction to this.

Not believing the little history, she asked, "How long have you been in Ashenden Towers?"

She could see, from where she stood, the darkening outline of the cupola and towers. The baronial-style mansion had been acquired years ago by the county's municipal authorities for its present use.

"I've been a voluntary patient there for two years." He struck a few pounding notes as if wishing to play again, then looked up with a brief smile. "I could tell you knew I was not speaking the truth. I thought I'd try out my old piece of bragging; forgive me. I was never in Leipzig, and this scar is the result of a minor operation done by a butcher of a surgeon in hospital. I had a boil the size of a walnut and it festered."

"Where is your home?" she permitted herself to ask, stepping from the verandah to just inside the room.

"In Blaxstone, where I was born. But my parents are dead and I have no relatives. I lived in lodgings—" He broke off and played a quick impromptu. "There *was* a young lady of Blaxstone—" He broke off again, the impromptu ending in an ironical-toned bang. "Sounds like a limerick. You know horrible Blaxstone?"

She nodded. It was a large industrial town fifteen miles away; she and Neville had driven through it when they came to the cottage for weekend visits to Janet and Allán. She could find nothing to say. But the pause did not seem awkward. A strange quietude had begun to irradiate her.

It was as if some mysteriously vague contact, obscurely of telepathic or psychic quality, was being established between her and this stranger. Whatever it was, it did not contain the chill of danger. But, as she leaned idly against one of the folded-back doors, she did not forget either that she had taken a sedative capsule or that this man had entered the house uninvited.

He resumed, "I used to be a teacher at one of the Blaxstone

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primary schools. But not of music. Elementary arithmetic and spelling for endless hordes of identical boys—they never stopped appearing on the horizon, yelling and howling, more and more of them. One day I went into a barber's and had my hair shaved off to the roots. *That* impressed the little wolves—that and my scar." Smiling, he passed a hand over his scalp. "I've always kept it the same."

She broke the further silence. "Will you play the waltz I heard from upstairs?"

"With pleasure." His thick square hands leapt up.

She told herself it was possible he had broken out of Ashenden Towers and was on the run. It might not be true that he was a voluntary patient. She knew that selected patients were allowed to walk around the district; Janet had told her about them one summer afternoon when they passed a group of the blue-jacketed men in the village.

But hadn't Janet said they were never alone? And surely there was a curfew hour, even for voluntary residents? How could she get him to go? Her mind only skimmed over these questions. The strange quietude persisted and made her faculties inert.

The waltz ended.

He said, "I belonged to the music club in Blaxstone. Amateurs, of course—that is to say revolving dogs everlastingly chasing their own ridiculous half tails."

Her failure to find any reply to this did not seem to matter. But as she looked out into the garden's sunset glow, which was fading rapidly now, she could feel his steady gaze on her.

And when she turned her head she saw an expression of deep concern on the strong, hard-jawed face. But it was a strictly neutral concern, and his tone was formal and detached as he asked, "Would you visit me in the Towers?"

"Why?" She spoke as if still feeling her way to the correct linking.

"I get no visitors now. One or two of the men teachers at my school came for the first few months. Then they dropped off, as people do, unless they're wives or sweethearts or parents—and sometimes even then. But I never had a lady visitor."

"I am only a visitor here myself." She had stopped herself giving the instinctive reply, I don't want to go to Ashenden Towers.

He nodded as if readily understanding the evasion, and said, "You look very sad. I used to see a lady painting in the gardens at the Towers. You remind me of her. She was not young and giggling, and not at all old. Dark-haired and pale and relaxed—yes, it's that, relaxed in your kind of way. She has left

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now. One of the male nurses told me her paintings were awful. But *she* was worth seeing. I used to look for her every day. She could make me feel—well, as I do when I'm playing an expensive piano like this one."

"How do *you* occupy yourself in the Towers?"

"Felling trees, sawing and chopping seasoned wood. It's in the therapy. I enjoy doing it. A hatchet in my hand gives me a feeling that I'm back in the world of Genesis. Those blockheads of boys I used to teach—they gave me *nothing*. The boredom!" Her random question seemed to have set him off.

"This county has one of the lowest intelligence averages in England. Ashenden Towers, big though it is, ought to be big enough to give the whole county periodic psychotherapy. Or is it that *all* people, everywhere, should have such retreats to fly to, the world being what it is?" He pulled himself up. "But excuse me. We debate like this in the Towers."

Abruptly, he rose and came towards her. She did not move, watching his approach from under her lids. Still no sense of danger made her prickle into wariness. He stopped close to her, smartly clicked his heels, and gave a stiff bow. It was almost a burlesque of an immensely proper courtesy, military in discipline.

And his punctilious tone was in keeping, "I have taken too much of your time. Permit me to go now. Could I play the piano another day?"

Her automatic consent was as stiltedly formal.

He bowed again, and she watched him crossing the lawn to the white gate. After carefully fastening the latch behind him, he saluted her.

She stood by the glass door until the sound of his brisk footsteps died away into the evening silence.

"Are many patients in Ashenden Towers allowed to roam outside?" she asked Mrs. Pryde the next morning. Straightforward bulk prominent in a tight checked overall, Mrs. Pryde obviously moved among solid facts wherever she trod; she had raised six hefty sons, and none of them, she told Jean, had ever set foot inside a police station.

"Only those who're safe, ma'am—and only the men ones, usually. I saw three or four in the village post office yesterday. Miss Andrews, our postmistress, says they're for ever sending off those coupons for football competitions."

"They're always in groups, aren't they?"

"Oh no, they wander off alone sometimes," said Mrs. Pryde.

Jean, secateurs in hand, stepped out to the warm garden. The golden clarity of the morning light had made the patient's sunset

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visit, and her own half-hypnotised passivity during it, seem phantasmagoric, like an episode in a dream. It still haunted her a little. But no ordinary significance, she told herself, could be applied to that visit. The clinical had no jurisdiction over the routines of normal life.

When Mrs. Pryde left, Jean began a new watercolour composition with fine preliminary flourishes. Sleep, after much less preoccupation with the problem of her husband, had come more easily in the night.

Pausing from work on the sunny verandah among the slackened eglantine tendrils, she could not dismiss the stranger from her mind. She found herself wishing he would return. It was as though he held, in his half-world of retreat, some elusive meaning for her. And when at about four o'clock, while she still was at work, she heard his voice calling, " Good afternoon! " she did not start.

He stood outside the gate, waiting with stiff politeness. Her first thought was that the shaved head gleaming in the sunshine suggested the theatrical affectation of an exhibitionist. The qualm was momentary.

" Do you want to play the piano? " she called, dipping her brush into the cup of water. It occurred to her that she sounded as though she was addressing a child.

" May I? "

" It might give me needed inspiration." Laying strokes of umber below her idea of a beech tree, she did not look up until he stood beside her. " I haven't painted for years," she said defensively.

" Gaudy! " he commented in a schoolmasterly way. " It's not quiet, as an autumn scene should be. Burning sunflowers, a fiery beech, blazing purple daisies—they're too violent and harsh."

" They were like that in the full sun."

He laid a paper bag on the low table. " Some mushrooms I've collected for you in the fields. They'll be the last this season."

She smiled an acknowledgment and went on painting. The piano was being lent him—that was all. He walked into the room and thereafter played with scarcely a break. The sunlight moved finally off the garden beech. Tomtits darted, and an owl, its sudden flapping making her tremble, rushed over the garden as if summoned too early to an unexpected mission.

She got up and entered the sitting-room. He took no notice, absorbed in his skipping hands, head bent. She went into the kitchen, put on the kettle, and prepared a teatray.

Returned to the sitting-room, she had to call his attention to

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her presence. He stopped playing at once. "This piano is bringing the meaning back into my hands," he said, taking the cup of tea without looking at her. "I've been chopping wood too long in the Towers. Going back to nature can't be a fulltime job for me . . . I had thought to take up forestry for a living," he explained.

"You won't return to teaching when you leave the Towers?" The difficulty in establishing an easy link with him began to trouble her again.

"Teaching?" He shrugged. "I don't know. In any case, no one can be taught anything worth while by anyone else." The steady eyes rested on her now; though remaining the eyes of a man established in a private or abstract sphere, they became concerned.

"As I see it," he resumed earnestly, "all that matters is some exchange—or a sharing—between human beings." He took a sip of tea, smiled, and less portentously added, "Such as human beings allowing their pianos to be played by anyone."

Remembering that he had walked into the house without leave the day before, she said, still in difficulty, "It's good for the piano, I expect." That's a niggardly reply, she thought.

A party of tits began to dash and gyrate in the mauve light of the garden, close to the open doors. His eyes moved to their coruscating dance of chase and escape.

After a musing pause, he said, "Before I had my breakdown I was engaged to a girl in Blaxstone. But she began to get on my nerves, though I remained fond of her.

"I began to see that she wanted to organise everything for me, even telling me what clothes to wear, telling my landlady what food I ought to have, telling me that too much sitting at the piano was bad for me. When we walked the streets she'd fasten on to my arm and cling against me, so that I always had to shorten my steps. I began to think of her as a growing little octopus. She wanted to *eat* me—if you understand such an exaggeration?"

"Perhaps she felt uncertain of you and in her confusion adopted wrong tactics?"

He shook his head, and continued, "For me, the whole affair got to that exaggerated pitch. One Saturday night we were in a crowded bus and had separate seats across the gangway. But the space between us didn't stop her fastening on to my arm; when someone wanted to get past, back came her hand after she'd dropped it. She was giving me this great treat of herself—all of her, body and soul and the house her Aunt Ellen left her in a will, and she wanted the whole world to know it.

"A couple of chaps behind us sniggered when she said she'd

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finished the thick winter socks she'd been knitting for me. Suddenly—I couldn't help myself—I shook her hand away, ran to the platform and jumped off while the bus was doing about twenty; I could have broken my leg. I never saw her again."

Jean said nothing. Surely this rather ordinarily wrecked courtship hadn't caused his breakdown? Perhaps the Blaxstone girl had had a lucky escape.

He proceeded, "As I've sat quietly in the Towers I've often thought there can be a turning point in love where it becomes a disease—or, if you've got sense, just an infection you can soon cure. I *was* fond of Anne, I wanted to go to bed with her. But she would have smothered my life. All the same, after my hop off the bus, guilt and remorse gobbled this lad up."

The monologue's neutrality remained unchanged as he said, "You see, Anne swallowed disinfectant. *That* was disease. She didn't swallow enough, though. She was taken to hospital in time, and a year afterwards married a rates clerk who worked in the Town Hall."

He looked out at the whirring tomtits, smiled, and played a brief impromptu.

"The birds are not so dependent on each other," he said. "But they keep together in that harmonious pattern."

Jean sat gazing at the palm of her hand. All the time she had had a sense that he watched her, yet did not watch. And abruptly, as on the previous visit, he rose from the piano and approached where she sat near the open doors. The birds fled.

"However," he said, "we mustn't take ornithological habits as standards of behaviour—think of the cuckoo and the vulture!" He repeated the heel-clicking, bowing performance and asked permission to play the piano the next day.

"Yes, of course," she replied automatically.

He stepped out to the verandah, remarked like a normal visitor, "The weather is going to change," turned to salute her, and strode across the lawn as briskly as before.

The next morning, Friday, brought in autumn's worst at a gallop. There had been a violent storm soon after dawn. Leaves shoaled down from the trees. The last tall sunflowers staggered under the rainy wind's onslaught. Congested clouds loured over the wooded slopes, blotting out Ashenden Towers.

Other people's houses have a way of announcing rules and regulations applicable to the property. That morning the summer cottage, its atmosphere dank, closing-in, and repudiating, seemed to be waiting for the exit of this intruder who delayed its season of apathy.

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When the telephone rang, at nine, the strident bell was an outrage of the quiet. But the caller was only Mrs. Pryde, asking if she could be excused from coming that morning. Labours of the youngest of her six daughters-in-law, a panicky girl, had begun untimely with the dawn's terrible thunder and lightning.

At half past nine the loud rat-tat of the door knocker was another outrage. It was the elderly postman in a dripping oilskin cape. A long way to bring two cards. She read them in growing anger. One, in quick scrawled writing, ran:

> Dear Jean—I went to the flat for mail. There are three letters for you: one with Tring postmark; one, Edinburgh; one illegible. I find it difficult to believe you really mean your " no letters " fiat—hence, in my doubt, this open card. Am I to readdress these three to the hideout?—N.
>
> Oh, I nearly forgot. There is an invitation for us from

The other card continued:

> Mary Gerrold: a christening party for her babe Perdita —poor little near-bastard, what a name! Shall I say you've got mumps, measles, croup, or what? Besides, what gift for the wee calf? I won four quid on the dogs, Tuesday, and two at bridge at Emily's last night. Luck's in. Or the law of compensation in operation?
>
> Obediently—N.

The fiat, she raged, had not prevented him writing a properly sealed letter earlier that week. Did he imagine she would be affected by this campaign of ridicule? She threw the cards into the stubborn log fire she had kindled in a hearth which seemed determined to thwart such use of it.

By noon a whole long day had been endured. Gusty slashings of rain outside accentuated the heavy interior silence; wind came down the wide old chimney and blew acrid smoke into the room. She couldn't concentrate on painting. There was no radio. To telephone friends in London betokened a weakening of resolution in this test of fortitude. There was nothing to do but read or think.

Seven days of seclusion had not yet brought decision. " Decision on what? " she asked herself, and at the reply, " To leave him," knew all the weight of depression a grave decision on another person's fate can bring.

She remembered the remarks of his eldest sister, who had reared him. " Neville is a lightweight but is astute enough to know he needs your ballast, Jean; and, incidentally, that you're five years older than he is in keeping with that. Don't be taken

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in by his frivolity; he can be hard and unyielding, and he's very respectful of family ties."

Well, he had an opportunity now to display either his unyielding side or his respect for ties. She would not budge from the cottage for weeks, if necessary—that, at least, was a firm decision.

After eating a grilled slice of ham, she settled on the sofa before the fire with *Villette*. The wind had slackened, but rain continued to spatter at the windows.

Mrs. Pryde telephoned again, not only to ask if one of her sons could bring anything from the village but to announce the birth of a boy. " I'm grandmother to fourteen boys now, and only two girls," she cackled.

She'd be along the next morning as usual, and bring for the weekend one of two plump chickens her husband had just killed in honour. Her voice seemed to arrive from a far country of ageless tribal customs.

The afternoon closed early. Jean kept looking at the clock. The stranger did not come. Why should he, in such weather? Those abrupt departures proclaimed that only the piano, to which he had helped himself so oddly on the first occasion, really interested him. *Villette* fallen to the hearthrug, she dozed off under the shaded lamp beside the sofa, and it was half past six when the sound of tapping woke her.

She saw the stranger's face looking in at the french windows. No disquietude came to her, but seconds passed before her hand motioned him to enter. He opened one of the doors. The damp breeze wafted a golden leaf over the floor. Behind him, the dark was thick and sodden.

" My shoes are muddy," he said doubtfully, standing in uncertainty by the closed door. The military-like stiffness was not in evidence.

" It doesn't matter. Put your raincoat on that chair."

" I couldn't come this afternoon. I had to wait a long time to see Dr. Macpherson, the superintendent. You see, I decided last night to discharge myself. I can leave tomorrow, if I wish. That is why I'm able to be out as late as this." Was it shyness that came into the fresh-coloured, healthy face? " I wanted to tell someone—someone outside, you see."

She got up, threw more logs on the dying fire, and said, " Well, that's good news. Are you going to have your half-hour of practice? " She switched on another light.

He took a folded paper from a pocket of his blue jacket and, advancing, deferentially handed it to her. " I thought you'd like to see this—the programme of a concert I gave three years ago."

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He disappeared round the wall angle and began to play. The mimeographed sheet announced:

BLAXSTONE MUSIC CLUB
Piano Recital by Peter Bates

Below was a list of items. Looking at that name, she wished he had remained in anonymity. Why had he brought her this programme? Did he expect some sort of help or patronage? But she knew he expected nothing, unless it was that exchange between human beings. The sheet was only some sort of guarantee of his identity. She lay back listening, liking him there, using that piano; when he stopped she regretted her remark about the half-hour.

"Thank you," he said, appearing round the angle and bowing to her like a performer acknowledging applause. The persistent deference was disconcerting.

"What were those pieces?"

Surprise flickered into the steady greenish eyes. "Only one piece, really. Beethoven's *Appassionata*. My best showpiece. I spent a year practising it."

She stretched an arm to give him the sheet. "I see it's in your programme. I know nothing about music. The piano isn't mine. Or this house."

"I know. The married couple who live here in the summer allowed me to come in several times to play. The gentleman had seen me at the gate listening to the lady playing."

Why hadn't he told her this before? She remembered his lie about Leipzig. For two years the Ashenden Towers authorities had agreed to his withdrawal there. Was it true that he was leaving? But, as she looked at him, her sudden uneasiness vanished. She said, indicating a chair, "Won't you sit down?"

He sat cross-legged on the hearthrug. For some moments he gazed without a word at the now brightly glowing logs. And when he asked, "You are unhappy?" it was in a tentative way. "We get to know the real scent of it," he added.

"Why didn't you tell me you used to come here in the summer?"

He pondered. "I wanted to be anybody and nobody, and I liked it that you didn't tell me anything of yourself. Just for a few minutes, when you found me in this room on Wednesday, I could see you judged me a real madman and I couldn't stop myself saying my idiot's piece about Leipzig and the duel scar.

"But afterwards I saw that you didn't mind me here; you didn't ask me too much, but you were interested and kind, letting me come again and play and talk as I wished. You accepted

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me. Acceptance is one of the big, important things. You helped me to decide to leave the Towers."

"You must live as much as possible for music," she said, defeated in a wish to tell him what he had brought to her. The triteness of her remark oppressed her. A sudden childish need to weep came; the struggle to resist the tears was hard.

He had turned his head. He leaned forward on an elbow. The threatened flow of tears subsided. She watched his thick hand approach and touch her knee for a moment. "Don't cry," he whispered, and had withdrawn his hand when she heard the sound of a car stopping in the lane.

"Should I play the piano again?" he asked. Waiting for her reply, he seemed not to have heard the car; and he only turned his head in undisturbed inquiry when, a minute later, the glass door opened.

The young man who entered glanced at the couple by the fireside with a lack of surprise too. Trim and confident, he laid down a large canvas bag, shut the door, and crossed to them. His bag, town-cut country tweeds, and the entry by the french windows, announced a weekend visitor familiar with the cottage.

To Jean, patting her rigid shoulder, he said, "Hullo, darling. You've had a soaking down here today." He looked down his fine aquiline nose at the blue-jacketed man squatting on the hearthrug.

"This is my husband," Jean said, and the stranger rose, slowly, to his feet. She added over her shoulder to Neville, "Mr. Bates." Effort to pronounce the name was as jarring as the necessity to focus on the factual element brought into the room.

Neville, after a conventionally friendly nod to Mr. Bates, had gone to his bag. "In case you hadn't much here, Jean, I've brought some stuff." He produced two bottles of champagne, then held up an object in a plastic wrapping. "I popped down to Leadenhall market from the office and got this pheasant."

He went to the cabinet and selected three glasses. Smashing the silence again, he said, "Can't wait. Started out at four."

He seized a bottle of champagne. There was a nervous jerk in his movements now. The exploding cork destroyed the room's last vestiges of silence. "Shaken up in the car," he commented, pouring.

Mr. Bates, looking at Jean, said, "I must go now." Total acquiescence lay in his unflickering eyes. Adjacent to the debonair, fine-spun trimness of Neville's physique, he looked almost crudely stolid.

She began, helplessly, "Will you come to lunch tomorrow—"

"Not a quick one?" Neville coaxed the stranger absently.

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"I have to go." The simple explanation was said mildly, but the rejection of the graceful young man holding a crystal goblet was complete. He took up his raincoat.

Jean had followed him across the room. She opened the glass door. "Thank you for the music," she said and, regretful, soothing, acknowledging, touched his hand. "Come and play tomorrow if you wish."

He gave her a brief smile. She knew he would not come. He bowed to Neville. She watched him pass from the throw of lamplight into the dark of the garden.

"Who is that rum-looking chap?"

She walked towards the staircase. "Janet and Allan let him come here to play the piano." She went quickly up the stairs and into her room.

Several minutes elapsed—time enough for the drinking of two or three glasses—before Neville came up. He turned the door-knob, then called, "Jean, this is quite mad, you know! Locking a door solves nothing."

She unlocked the door. "It doesn't," she agreed as he walked in. "But I don't want you here—that's all." She sat hunched up on the edge of the bed.

He skimmed restlessly about the room. Wariness, consternation and—she especially noticed—dread, exuded from him. All he had was flippancy, which at the moment he dared not use. A dismayed underwail ran in his voice as he said, "Surely three years is much too short a period for us to get tired of each other?"

"I suppose," she remarked, unable not to be shrewish, "you're anxious about the dinner party for the Midlands people next week?"

"That's only important commercially." Straining hard to express himself honestly, he added censoriously, "I certainly become vexed by slovenly upsets of business arrangements."

"But not of slovenly behaviour unconnected with business, of course. Though three years is much too soon for us to be tired of each other."

He took out a gold case—her wedding present—and lit a cigarette; even his fingers seemed to express the dismay of a well-brought-up young man caught in a misdemeanour. At the same time, he could not resist taking a characteristically assessing glance at his face in the dressing-table mirror.

"Gerda," he said, "was only a marginal reminder of what was more in my line before I met you." He shook his head. "She's become just a piece of bint now. It's a pity she wasn't like that when she used to visit Cambridge to see her brother."

"Only delayed action, was it?" Belligerence threatened to

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undo her. "Hangovers from adolescence are repulsive in a man of your age."

"Oh dear! I wish you'd seen them as signs of unimpaired energy." His bright eye cocked down on her, along that debonair beak. He was itching to give a chirp. The fright hadn't gone.

But, when she gave a deep sigh, almost instantaneously he perched beside her on the bed. "Is it necessary to be so *melancholy*, darling? Running away! It's extraordinary how different you looked, sitting at the fireside with that scarred chap. I had a new vision of you, and it made me quite nervous." He stroked her drooped head.

She thought of the stranger walking through the dark pine-woods, and knew that what he had revealed to her was the basic isolation of the human being.

Still stroking her hair, Neville began to gossip as if to a convalescent. "I was buying a pot of caviare this afternoon—it's in my bag—and I collided with Mary Gerrold. Inquisitive isn't the word! But I shut her trap by saying we'd both be at the christening.

"She bounced her pair of melons up almost in my chin and said, 'There's *nothing* like it, Neville!' So smug.

"Imagine it, *that* one! Anyone would think she'd patented the process and intended cornering the market."

Her husband's caressing hand swivelled her head round to him.

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★ ★ ★

WHEN YOU COME

Don't laugh at my tower for being so high;
Think what pleasure I shall gain from its being so high!
I shall not have to wait till you arrive;
I shall see you clearly ten leagues away!

But when you come, do not come in your coach!
The sound of a coach scares my birds away.
When you come do not ride your horse;
For it might be hungry and try its teeth on my plants.

When you come, don't come too early;
We country people stay late in bed.
But when you come, don't come too late;
For late in the day the flowers are not at their best.

YUAN MEI, 1716-1797, *translated by Arthur Waley*

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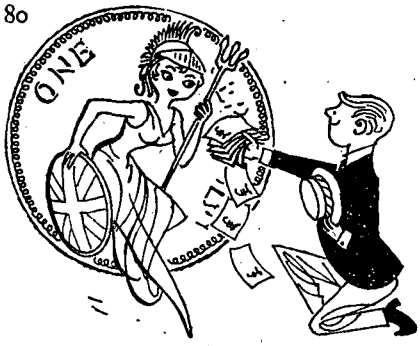

MONEY MOON

A love-match is generally a failure
and a money-match is always a mistake

GEORGE NORMAN DOUGLAS

Hortensio: *I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife*
With wealth enough, and young and beauteous;
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman;
Her only fault—and that is fault enough—
Is—that she is intolerably curst,
And shrewd, and forward; so beyond all measure
That, were my state far worser than it is,
I would not wed her for a mine of gold.

Petruchio: *Hortensio, peace! thou know'st not gold's effect:—*
Tell me her father's name, and 'tis enough:
For I will board her though she chide as loud
As thunder, when the clouds in autumn crack.

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Purse-strings Attached

"You really *are* smitten, aren't you, Joe?" Eva said as we walked down the passage behind the foyer.

"I suppose she's already attached to someone," I said gloomily.

"She's not engaged," Bob said. "But watch out for Jack Wales. Bags of money, about seven foot tall and a beautiful R.A.F. moustache."

I laughed. "I eat those types for breakfast," I said. "Besides, my admiration is purely artistic." Even to me it didn't sound very convincing, but I felt myself being pushed into the position of the poor man at the gate, the humble admirer from afar.

JOHN BRAINE, *Room at the Top*

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Desperate

There's nothing but money can cure me,
And rid me of all my pain!
'Twill pay all my debts,
And remove all my lets,
And my mistress, that cannot endure me,
Will love me, and love me again:
Then I'll fall to my loving and drinking amain!

ALEXANDER BROME, *Love, Drink, and Debt*

Bad Fortune

Mr. Beaumaris replied with disastrous clarity: "My dear Charles, when you have been hunted by every trick known to the ingenuity of the female mind, you may more readily partake of my sentiments upon this occasion. I have had beauties hopeful of wedding my fortune swoon in my arms, break their bootlaces outside my London house, sprain their ankles when my arm is there to support them, and now it appears that I am to be pursued even into Leicestershire! An accident to her coach! Famous! What a green-horn she must believe me to be!"

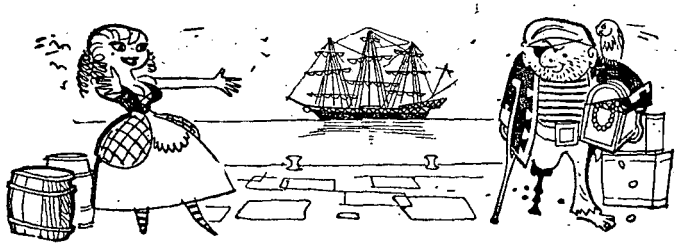
GEORGETTE HEYER, *Arabella*

Fair Shares

My wife insists that she and I
Keep separate accounts
Of what we spend and what put by,
Both large and small amounts . . .

Each month (there's nothing she prefers)
The cheques and stubs she scours,
To make quite sure that hers is hers,
And what is mine is ours.

RICHARD ARMOUR, *Madness in her Method*



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Be Done By As You Did . . .

" Come, my own one; come, my dear one;
Come, my darling, unto me.
Will you wed with a poor sailor boy
Who has just returned from sea? "

" No, indeed I'll have no sailor,
Who is dirty, smells of tar,
You are ragged, you are dirty,
Get you gone, you Jacky Tar."

" If I'm ragged, if I'm dirty,
If indeed of tar I smell,
Yet I've silver in my pockets
And a store of gold as well."

When she heard him thus address her
Down upon her knees she fell.
Saying, " Dirty, ragged sailors,
I love more than words can tell."

Folksong

Fortune Favours the Rich

Her [the Empress Theodora's] venal charms were abandoned to a promiscuous crowd of citizens and strangers of every rank and of every profession; the fortunate lover who had been promised a night of enjoyment was often driven from her bed by a stronger or more wealthy favourite; and when she passed through the streets, her presence was avoided by all who wished to escape either the scandal or the temptation.

EDWARD GIBBON,
The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire

Cards on the Table

Prithee, pretty maiden, will you marry me?
(Hey, but I'm hopeful, willow, willow, waly!)
I may say, at once, I'm a man of propertee—
(Hey willow waly O!)
Money, I despise it;
Many people prize it,
(Hey willow waly O!)

W. S. GILBERT, *Patience*

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LARSEN'S COURTSHIP

She hung them out like red and yellow flags among the washing

BY ALAN C. HEMUS

AFTER four lonely months on the hill farm, Odd Larsen, level-headed and used to solitude as he was, suddenly began to notice in himself a need for expression.

At first, while he confined the urge to addressing his two bedded-down cows and four cages of mink, he was not unduly perturbed. Odd Larsen had trapped in the wilds long enough to be philosophical in regard to slight deviations in character. He could even shrug it off when he discovered himself including inanimate objects in the discussion. It was only when he heard a fence-post answer back that Odd began to worry. He abandoned the rest of his morning's work, put on skis, and journeyed down into the valley.

Travelling across the lake he came upon Bjorn, his father's brother, gloomily examining fish-hooks withdrawn, naked and unadorned, from an overnight hole.

Odd's greeting was answered in the bitter way of a frustrated fisherman. Bjorn said it was not a nice day. He said it might look nice with the sun shining but, mark his words, there was at least a half-blizzard brewing up, and what about that avalanche last night? "Smack on the road," said Bjorn with sullen glee. The bus would not be running to the valley for a week.

Then he realised it was his nephew standing before him and wished him a good morning.

"I need a haircut," said Odd, indicating the blond thatch half covering his ears.

Bjorn nodded and said he could see that. "Wonder you don't get it entangled with your skis. Come to the house; I can always get my shears sharpened afterwards for the sheep."

The house was behind Bjorn's store, which combined post office and general merchandise. They left their skis in the porch and trudged round to the yard where Odd was immediately hailed by an elderly lady hanging out washing.

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" Odd Larsen, you ingrate! So you've finally decided to pay your poor old aunt a visit."

Odd hugged her until she creaked in the middle. " I meant to come before, but you know how it is. One gets so busy."

" On a hill farm in winter, nonsense! " she retorted. " Ingrid, go and make coffee for this shaggy-haired hermit." She bustled away into an outbuilding with the empty clothes-basket.

" Black as sin, scalding hot, and strong enough to float nails; have I remembered how you like it, Odd? " asked Ingrid. She was a young woman, small and pleasantly plump, round-faced, and with laughing eyes.

Odd grinned back. " You're forgetting something," he said.

" I am not," said Ingrid, brushing past him. " With just a pinch of pepper. And I'll test it with a flat iron," she added. " When I call you in, you'll know it floats."

Odd grinned again. He liked Ingrid. She was one of the few women with whom he could feel at ease; having spent many years trapping in remote places, he was not quite house-broken and inclined to regard the gentle sex with considerable awe.

It had always been different with Ingrid, from the day when, seven years before, Odd's cousin Magnus had brought her back from Bergen. Ingrid, radiant in her wedding dress, had chosen Odd for a dance. He had trodden all over her, but Ingrid had thanked him with a smile and a squeeze of the hand. She still gave him that same smile, and Odd felt a sense of regret for Magnus. His cousin had been a professional skier, an A Class jumping champion with a nerve admired throughout the country. It was still admired in retrospect, and Magnus was buried in the churchyard in the valley.

There were two other people with Bjorn. One Odd recognised as Ulrik Hauge, son of a farmer from the far end of the valley. Odd had vague memories of him as a child; now he was a hulking bear of a youth, three inches higher than Odd's six foot, and hung with writhing coils of muscle. Odd gave him a brief nod and then forgot all about him. He was suddenly aware of the girl, and for Odd Larsen the moment became memorable.

" Don't say you've forgotten me, Cousin Odd."

" Blood and thunder! " said Odd, blinking. Musie had been in Bergen when he'd come back from his trapping a few months before.

Odd studied her from short waving flaxen hair to trimly-booted feet. He saw eyes as clear as a mountain stream, high cheekbones, lips that were full and very red, a figure all curves and supple strength. Odd Larsen saw this in one brief instant and knew why fence-posts talked back to him, and he knew the cure.

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"Musie, by thunder, but you're different," he said.

"Just age, that's all," said Musie demurely. "It comes to all of us. I'll be nineteen in a few months." She tilted her head and gazed at Odd in a way that made his tongue dangle; he looked like a sledge dog drooling over a choice hunk of frozen fish.

"These trappers notice things real quick. Eyes like hawks they've got," Ulrik Hauge said. He was giving Odd a sidelong glance as he spoke, and Odd suddenly felt that Ulrik was not a friend.

"Don't be daft, Ulrik," said Musie. "That was a compliment. Why can't you think of something nice like that to say?"

"Why waste your time? She knows 'em all," grunted Bjorn, returning from the house with a cardboard box under one arm. "Before long I'll be sitting up at night with a shotgun. Let's go, boy."

He led Odd into a shed at one end of the yard, sat him on a bench, and gave him a bundle of newspapers to tuck into his collar. Bjorn dragged up another bench and, operating theatre-wise, laid out an old pair of shears, two gaptoothed combs, a stub of candle, and two tin mugs.

He rummaged in a heap of straw and brought out a stone jug. "Anaesthetic?" he asked, reaching for the two tin mugs.

"Just a drop," said Odd, eyeing the jug with foreboding. Like most folk in the valley Bjorn occasionally turned his hand to a little distillation, with one difference. Bjorn's aqua-vitae invariably turned out slightly peculiar. Bjorn attributed this to the master's hand; but Odd, ever since the day he had caught his uncle diluting a mash with methylated spirit, had been inclined to the view that Bjorn experimented.

"Skol," said Bjorn, tossing back two fluid ounces. Odd echoed the toast and the action, then shuddered; a flood of tears washed down his cheeks. Bjorn smacked his lips with satisfaction. "There's a tipple that's got some body in it."

"Anyone I know?" Odd asked curiously.

"Just a manner of speaking," said Bjorn, trying the clippers on his wrist. "Do you want any of this thatch left?"

"Enough to run a comb through."

There the conversation ended for a few minutes. Bjorn did most of his clipping on sheep and he was a man of set habits. He had never actually held a human client between his knees, but his grip on the fleece was the same for man and beast. When Odd was allowed to lift his head and rub his bruises, Bjorn was singeing him with the candle.

"I need your advice," Odd said. He had been thinking during the operation. "Now I've given up trapping and am back home,

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I mean to settle down. About time I did, anyway. There's only one thing missing. I am thinking of taking a wife, Uncle."

"Take mine," said Bjorn, drawing the flame rapidly over a gap in the comb. "Damn good cook."

"I'd rather have your daughter," said Odd.

"I was afraid of that," Bjorn admitted. "I saw her giving you the works in the yard." He blew out the candle and began to extract the newspapers from his nephew's collar. "Nice girl, Musie, but very fond of collecting scalps. I am afraid you're in for a rough time, lad."

"Have you any objection to me as a son-in-law?" Odd asked earnestly. "I'm young and strong, my farm can be made to pay, and I have forty thousand kroner in a bank account."

"There are some attractive points to your nature," Bjorn admitted. "And you can take my homebrew like a man. Some of the nitwits she brings home fall flat on their faces after a couple of sips. I am agreeable, my boy; the question is—is Musie willing?"

"I'll ask her," said Odd, getting to his feet.

Bjorn pushed him back on the bench and looked at him pityingly. "The problem, lad, is not as simple as that." He tilted the stone jug over the mugs and began, between gulps, to speak seriously.

"You may be expert at catching seal and foxes, but women require less straightforward methods. It is no good saying to a woman, 'I need someone to cook, wash, sew, and raise sons for me.' It may be true, but she would find it offensive. You must phrase your proposal in more devious terms: tell her that you need her, that you cannot live without her. It amounts to the same in the end."

"You are a cynic," said Odd, feeling outraged. "I do not intend to marry your daughter merely to have my socks darned. My feelings are deeper than that."

"Excellent. You are learning already. Start your courtship with that in mind and try to impress it on the girl. Shower her with tender little attentions and gifts. Gifts are very important; women go for sentimental presents, and the more useless they are the more they love them."

"Such as what?" asked Odd, wrinkling his brow.

"Fripperies," said Bjorn. "Buy a woman a sensible present like a washtub and she'll spit in your eye. Give her a lace handkerchief and a pint of scent and she's yours for eternity."

"Handkerchiefs, scent," Odd mused.

His uncle nodded. "Dainty little things, they reach the tenderest depths of a woman's nature. I finally got your Aunt

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Ragnhild to accept me after presenting her with some silk underwear."

The notion shocked Odd. He blinked at his uncle.

Bjorn nodded sheepishly. "Two pairs of silk bloomers—one red, one yellow—wonderful texture but awfully flimsy. Of course, she always wears flannelette, but she often hangs them out like red and yellow flags among the washing for the neighbours to look at."

Odd felt that he was making momentous discoveries, but a slight distrust of Bjorn made him cautious. Any man who added meths to homebrewed hooch should be treated with reserve.

Ingrid had prepared coffee in the house, a steaming black potion that would have peeled a limpet off a rock, and Odd, seizing a moment when his uncle had gone into the store, put on a guileless face and sought confirmation from her.

"Supposing, just supposing," he said in an offhand way, "that a man wished to make advances to a girl. With the most honourable intentions," he added hastily. "Would it be proper for him to give the girl presents?"

"It is customary," replied Ingrid, peering thoughtfully at him. "Especially if she is a very pretty young girl."

"I see," said Odd slowly. It looked as though Bjorn had been right after all. He went into the store, looked over the shelves, and came across many useful things: tins of tobacco, sticks of ski wax, pairs of thick wool socks, but nothing that might be described as frippery. The only handkerchiefs that Bjorn stocked were the red ones with white spots that Odd himself favoured. Odd knitted his brows and made his way back to the kitchen and a fresh cup of coffee.

"Suppose," he said hopefully, "the man just went to the girl and said in a straightforward way, 'I wish to marry you.' Think of the fuss it would save."

"Women have to be courted," said Ingrid gently. "They like lots of little attentions and sentimental keepsakes, especially when they are very young. Then it is even more important."

"Hm," said Odd. He rose and headed for the porch. He put on his skis, ran across the lake, climbed the mile to his farm, and was back before Ingrid had finished washing his cup and saucer. Over his shoulder he carried a bundle.

"Give me your frank opinion," he said to Ingrid as he unrolled the bundle on the floor. "This is the best I can do at short notice. Would the woman we were discussing be interested in this as a keepsake?"

"What is it?"

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" A polar bear skin," said Odd proudly. " A prime one. And I took particular care to shoot it in the eye so that its skin wasn't spoilt. It should make a snug overcoat."

" It is a wonderful gift," Ingrid said hesitantly, " but not exactly a keepsake. It's like giving a girl a sack of flour and telling her to bake herself a cake."

" You have something there," Odd admitted. " Well, there's nothing else for it but to head into town and look round the shops."

" You'll have to wait until tomorrow, the road's blocked by snow."

" That's all right," said Odd casually. " I know a way over the mountain."

Ingrid's eyes widened. " Odd, there's a blizzard blowing up. It will be dangerous."

Odd grinned unconcernedly and said contemptuous things about little hills and feeble breaths of wind. He went on to talk of arctic gales, of winds so strong they bent iron bars and so cold that when you spat it landed with a solid sound thirty paces away. He talked at length, and all the time Ingrid watched him, an enigmatic expression in her eyes that made him feel he was talking through the back of his neck.

" You must be very much in love," she remarked when he had finished, a kind of flatness in her voice.

Odd, confused, said, " I'll admit it is not a case of suppose. There is such a man and it is me. Shall I do right to get this present? "

" Over the mountain in a blizzard," Ingrid whispered. " Odd, you are a gallant, a true Lochinvar."

" I don't think so," said Odd, reflecting. " Mother was an Olsen, and I can trace the Larsen family a long way. I can think of no one of that name."

" Oh, you wild man," said Ingrid, and a choking sound escaped her.

Then she came close and caught his sleeve. " You must try to be back tonight, Odd. You must put on your best suit and come down to the valley with your present. There is a dance after the Farmer's Union dinner. Musie will be there."

" But I'm no good at dances," protested Odd. " I choke in a shirt with a collar, and I keep treading on people."

" Faint heart never won fair lady," said Ingrid sternly.

There is more to this business than I expected, thought Odd, ski-ing over the lake. It seemed full of complexities. At the far side he turned and saw a figure standing at the door of Bjorn's yard. A hand waved to him and Odd shook his head

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in bewilderment. Then he climbed up the bank of the lake and turned to face the steep side of the valley and his problem.

There was a way to reach the town, apart from the mountain road now blocked. It was a route that led over the high field to the plateau and across to the railway. Odd had made the journey once or twice in the summer and found it tricky going. He could think of no one who had tried it in winter.

I'll be setting up a record, thought Odd glumly, daubing red wax on the soles of his skis.

He began the climb, following an icy path half a mile up the valley side until he reached the hill farm at its end, then continuing through sparse and untracked woods until he had passed the timberline. Here he was fairly high, exposed, and he began to feel the wind.

He climbed higher, still able to move with his skis pointing up the slope. He climbed steadily, conserving himself, and the valley began to dip away beneath him into a hollow. Above him the mountain was wrinkled like an old man's brow; the summit, high and to his right, was only the gateway to another peak, higher by five hundred feet.

The day was brisk, the snow still crisp, with the sun on the far slopes of the valley. An hour brought Odd to the first summit, and now the wind was no longer inquiring but downright inquisitive, feeling him with steely fingers. Odd put on his anorak and fastened the hood before schüssing a declivity between the climbs.

From here there was a choice of two routes. The first was direct, up and over, following the skyline to the plateau. This was the normal way, but now, with a lot of weather about, inclined to be uncertain. Odd turned to the left and followed the alternative route: a wall, two miles long, with a backbreaking two-way slope, in parts as slick as glass. But it did have the advantage of slight protection from the elements.

It took until midday to complete this ascent. The shelf was worse than he remembered, inconsistent in width, camber, footing. Red waxing presently proved ineffective, and Odd stopped to apply glister; then he went on with the sticky mixture binding him to the surface, caking under him in occasional soft patches. But the shelf was the most difficult part of the trip; afterwards there only remained a long haul round the shoulder of the final peak and the plateau lay beneath him.

A short run down took him into sunlight. Odd made a stop, scraped his skis and dug them into the snow to dry in the sun. He opened his haversack and lunched on the cheese and gherkin

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sandwiches Ingrid had prepared for him. Then he drank her coffee from a flask, and smoked a much-needed cigarette while he rubbed oil on his chapped face. A little later, rested and filled with peace borrowed from the white silence, he rubbed his skis with silver wax and made the six-mile journey to the station.

He returned to the valley in the dark that night. He came back as he had gone, running down the bridle-path from the peaks behind his farm. He devoted a half-hour to shaving and changing clothes, then skied into the valley, the trousers of his good black suit tucked into his socks. Over his shoulder he carried a pair of shoes and a parcel sewn up in canvas.

It was nearly ten o'clock when he reached the carpenter's shop, and he knew that by then the dinner would be ended, the hall cleared for dancing, and the younger people admitted.

He paused on the darkened verandah to change into his shoes, and a white figure left the shadows and came towards him.

"Odd! Oh, thank God!" said Ingrid. "Bjorn told us you'd gone by the mountains. I—we've been so worried."

"Tsch," said Odd magnificently. "You can't kill a trapper with an axe. Here, look after these boots for me."

Ingrid caught the package and boots and continued to look at him. Her eyes were enormous in the moonlight. She said quietly, "She's inside."

"Thanks," said Odd, patting her shoulder. Bjorn's homebrew appeared to have circulated considerably during the evening for one or two of the menfolk were looking glassy-eyed and the accordionist was being held in his chair by two small boys.

Musie looked up as Odd approached. She was wearing a laced white blouse, a black skirt that flared round the calves of her legs and elsewhere fitted like the skin of a fish, and she had the beauty of the northern lights on a stormless evening. She did not seem especially pleased to see her cousin.

"Hullo," said Odd, dropping down on the seat beside her. "Nice night."

"It's beastly," said Musie, her voice strangely young and shrill again. "How could you do this to me?"

"What?" said Odd in amazement.

"Climbing over mountains in a blizzard, that's what," snapped Musie, glaring at him. "Dad's been telling everybody and it's making me feel a proper fool. Suppose you'd got yourself killed, I wouldn't have been able to hold my head up again."

"I wouldn't either," said Odd, dragging his cousin on to the floor as the music started up. "Such family affection makes me proud, but let's dance."

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Musie suddenly smiled up at him and seemed to melt into his arms. She murmured, "I hate you. Oh, you wild trapper."

"That's better," said Odd, whirling her round. It was not a long dance. He was still trying to decide whether it was a waltz or a quickstep when the music stopped. The accordionist had fallen from his chair. His two attendants valiantly hauled him upright and placed his fingers on the keys, but before he could start again there was another interruption.

This was the moment Ulrik Hauge chose to detach himself from a group of friends, saunter across the floor, and flatten the unsuspecting Odd with one mighty swipe.

"That's a damn rude thing to do in the middle of a dance," said Odd, glaring up at him reprovingly.

Ulrik gnashed his teeth and performed a series of dainty ballet steps. "Get up," he snarled, waving fists the size of footballs. "Fight like a man."

"This should round off the dinner nicely," observed Bjorn happily. "I'll hold your coats, and you, Halvard, can hold the jug."

"Father, please stop them," Musie implored, clinging to his arm.

"Not on your life," said Bjorn. "On second thoughts, I'll hold the jug."

Odd got to his feet, speculating on the pleasure of giving this overgrown lout a sharp lesson. He thought how nice it would be to pull off one of those long arms and beat Ulrik over the head with it, and then suddenly the thought evaporated.

Odd rubbed his aching jaw and he began to laugh. He laughed. He laughed and laughed, and then he saw the astonishment on the faces about him and the tears rolled down his cheeks. He borrowed a drink from Bjorn's jug, and wandered off in search of fresh air.

Outside was a concrete balcony, and in the shadows the flutter of a white dress. Ingrid was gazing intently across the lake to the mountains.

"I saw what happened," said Ingrid, making room for him at the rail. "I'm sorry, Odd; terribly sorry."

"I shouldn't be," said Odd largely. "Good training for the lad if he means to marry that young minx."

"But I thought—" Ingrid began, when Odd interrupted her. He took his parcel from her, tore off the wrapping, and laid a large cardboard box between them on the balcony.

He said nervously, "That little keepsake is for you."

"Me?" said Ingrid, raising a hand to her throat.

"Girl," said Odd wearily, "I've had a hard day. I've climbed

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a mountain two ways in a blizzard, spent a painful time in a shop for women's underwear, had my head dented by a crazy youth, and I've even put on a stiff white collar."

"But, Odd—"

"Let me finish," said Odd.

He lifted the lid from the box as he spoke and revealed the contents, green silk bloomers—shimmering yards of them. "You said I must give you a little gift to start my courting, so there it is. Now, be honest and tell me if I have a chance."

"Odd, you idiot," gasped Ingrid, half laughing, half crying.

"I took the biggest they had," Odd explained. "They should keep you warm in winter."

In view of what happened in the next few minutes, Odd Larsen thereafter had a profound respect for his Uncle Bjorn's views on any subject.

There was only one thing that puzzled him in the years that followed. He knew Ingrid never wore his gift, but cherished the box, tightly fastened with tape, in a dark corner of her wardrobe.

Nor did she ever put them out on the clothes-line for the neighbours to gaze at.

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GOOD BAD BOYS

It was one mad, improbable, daring afternoon

BY CONNELL BERNARD

THERE was the time myself and Taff Pritchard decided to go fishing one hot day when we shouldn't have gone fishing at all if we'd had any sense; any fish with his fins screwed on would be staying out of the sunlit open water and taking a shadowy siesta, weedy and deep among the green stems of lilypads and the spears of rushes, quiet and cool as a pantry.

I mentioned this to Taff.

"Oh, nothing of the sort," he said. "Look at the time we caught that bagful of roach up at the manor pool. It was as hot as a oven that day, and the water had sunk so low the fish were wearing straw 'ats."

"I know, but it's even hotter today."

"They'll be fanning themselves as well then," he said.

You couldn't argue with him.

He was a rough, red-faced, big barndoor of a boy, humorous and harum-scarum, with a disorderly mat of hair and hands like navvies' feet; he was one class higher than me, and played rugby football for the school.

"Life is a scrum," he would say. "You got to get your 'ead down and shove."

The flat mallet of his own hard napper hammered home the wisdom of his words.

He liked fishing and birds' nesting, P.T. and games, and he was very kind to all animals.

Once he saw Lispy Willis, a bit of a bully with no smile and pale wet lips, dragging a stray cat along by the tail in the playground. Taff hit him so hard he was off school for two months with a fractured jaw. Because of Lispy's father, Taff got six on each hand and six on the bend.

"Why did you do it?" the headmaster asked him.

"Because the cat wasn't big enough to do it herself." Taff always said his piece and paid for it. "It was a lady cat and expecting kittens," said Taff. "It needed looking after, not hurting."

The headmaster, who loved justice, gave him a fortnight's

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detention for the sake of appearances and five shillings for his observation and sense of honour. I only found out about the money because Taff had a new reel the next time we went fishing at Paris' farm.

All of which doesn't get us any farther with the story . . .

" All right," I said. " Where shall we go? "

There was a nice little pool at the spinney corner of the big wheatfield at Paris' farm where the brook ran wide. It was nice and shady, too, under the trees. If there was no sport we used to laze about or dam the brook where it got narrow again.

My mother made a packet of sandwiches and put them in my satchel with some apples and a bottle of pea-green limeade, and by the time Taff came round with his tackle I was waiting at the bus stop outside our house.

" Hullo, goin' fishing? " said the conductor, eyeing the bundle of rods when we got on.

" No, chimney sweeping," said Taff. " Two 'alves to Shallowbrook Lane, please."

" Threepence and less of your lip," said the conductor, " or I'll punch your 'ead instead of the tickets."

Stood up, sweating in his braces, he was only about as tall as Taff sitting down; we bit our tongues so as not to snigger and looked through the window.

" Don't know what kids are coming to these days," said a woman like a weasel, crouching behind us.

It was nine stops to Shallowbrook Lane. I lost count of the telegraph poles after forty-seven through having Taff nudge me to point out the posh, pebble-dashed bungalow where his latest lived.

We got out at our country stop, passing meekly by the cocky little conductor, big as a bantam. When the game old bus wheezed like whooping-cough and started to pull away, we stuck out our tongues and blew raspberries, thumbed our noses and shouted abuse.

" Ta ta, Shorty! "

" Ta ta, Little Tich! "

" You couldn't punch a hole in a wet paper bag! "

The furious little conductor, boiling like a kettle, danced on the step as mad as a midget.

" I'll remember you two. I know your ugly faces. I'll come up to the school."

" Mind they don't keep you," shouted Taff happily.

The nosey woman was looking round through the bus window, blue-lipped and scraggy as her own rats'-fur tippet.

" Go on, you old ferret," Taff called after her.

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We jumped up and down in the road until the bronchial bus was out of sight, and it was quiet again.

"Listen to that quiet," said Taff, holding up a finger like a fat man's toe. "Oh, I want to work on a farm. I'm bloody fed up with school, I am, straight. I don't want to go back."

"Nor me," I said, "but what can you do?"

It was about a mile down the lane to the stone stile where you crossed Paris' fields to get to the brook; you could take a short cut before this if you dared. We looked across as we passed by the neglected field path that would have saved us twenty minutes.

Rooks floated like charred paper above the black bonfire of Shuddery Wood. They called it that because it was ghostly and full of owls, and haunted by a gamekeeper who had been found dead there once, shot through the heart.

It was a wood full of the thicket threat of hidden mantraps, sickly plants, sour moss, and stale bog-smells, the stink of witches and white-bellied toadstools. Nobody knew what printless feet trod the rotting rides in the dark of the sun.

"Look at the way the rooks are riding with the wind above the trees," said Taff, who noticed everything. "They've been disturbed. I bet there's somebody in the wood. They won't settle down again till he's gone."

"P'raps it's the ghost of Sam Scarlet," I said.

"Oh, you don't believe that rot, do you?" scoffed Taff. "Show me the ghost I couldn't put a 'alf nelson on. I'm going the short way. I'll give him Sam bloody Scarlet if I see him!"

He was always using the word bloody.

I caught his arm lightly, just to warn him.

"You never hear a bird singing in that wood," I told him, "and the farm dogs won't go near it."

"No, that's a fact," said Taff, suddenly remembering and forced to consider in mid stride. "Ah well, it's only a bit farther the other way."

"And don't forget Lispy's brother breaking out with warts after playing in there. He had them for months."

"You get warts through handling toads," said Taff. "I used to get 'em."

Nevertheless we left Shuddery Wood, deadly as nightshade, stealthy with fanged glades of ferns and foxgloves, to brood with the owls and the black-souled rooks. The lane before us beckoned, even more inviting and full of promise, like an enchanted path.

As we went along, pollen-happy bees drunk from the still of summer zoomed round our heads like little flying threshing

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machines, and the threshers in the hiving wheatfields made a noise like distant bees. The poker-hot sun seared down on the pebbled surface of the lane and little pools and bubbles of melted tar shone like black treacle or ran glistening among the white dusty stones. Heatwaves shimmered off the upturned china teacups on the telegraph poles, danced along barbed-wire fences, and distorted with desert images the sahara strip of the road ribboning ahead.

In the stifling ovens of the flagging hedges only yellowhammers chintzed occasionally, calling for a little bit of bread and no cheese, and the stuffy shade of the hedgebottoms sheltered small shy flowers that bent their heads and avoided the brazen eye of the sun. Even in plimps, concertina'd socks, and open-chested shirts with short sleeves we began to get uncomfortable; I was sweating, and feeling as done as a crumpet.

" This bottle of pop in my satchel will be boiling by the time we get there," I said, blinking the sweat from my eyes.

" Let's sit under that bush and drink it now," said Taff. " We'll have a little rest. My tongue's as dry as a 'atband."

We swigged from the warm bottle in the welcome shade, kicking off our plimsolls to give our feet an airing. Taff had a ragged spud in the end of each sock; his big toes sprouted out like the buttons of mushrooms. I was glad my own holes were respectably darned. I unwrapped my paper packet and we each had a sandwich of lettuce, tomato, and cheese.

" Mm, smashing! " said Taff. " You must have a real nice mother, making you sandwiches, darning your socks so neat, and everything."

" She's the best," I said.

" I can't remember mine," said Taff. " She died when I was seven. My dad talks about her sometimes."

We talked on, about leaving school, and growing up in general; it seemed we were padlocked in the stocks of school, and that life was passing us by before we had a chance to get to grips with it.

We compiled and compared a list of the masters we did not like, and shortly found out we didn't care for anybody on the staff apart from Major Briggs, gymnasium, and Mr. Widderley, the geography teacher, who let us go early and told us stories about gold-prospecting in the Yukon. They fired off your imagination and passed the time.

" I want to travel the world," I said, " from the Yukon onwards, and then settle down in a house in the country and write stories. What do you want? "

" All the girls," said Taff rudely. " All the girls from 'ere

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:o Timbuktu!" And a wide grin cracked across his face like a slice chipped out of a melon. He reached for his plimsolls. " Come on, or the fish'll get tired of waiting."

" I bet only the gnats will be biting today," I said.

From the stile it was three fields to the spinney between Paris' and Padgett's land where the brook ambled through sweet, tangled, wild-scented banks, missed its footing and fell over a mossy ledge of rock into a body-deep clear pool with a sandy bottom which sloped gradually up to a shelf of freshwater shingle on the other side. This dammed the pool, and the halted water overflowed gently across the small singing stones and meandered on downstream.

Old Padgett's corn was still standing, blue with cornflowers and donkeythistle, humming and hiving, full of rabbit runs, the secrets of beetles, and nests of harvest mice. You wanted to run into it, disappear from reality like Alice, shrink and find out for yourself among the beanflowers and the cool blooms of clover, free as a bee to seek and sip the distilled essence of the sweetness of this high dry summer world.

The corn was breast high, lifting and shifting like an Atlantic sea; the whole world of the field was the field of the whole world. I wanted to go in and explore, but Taff wouldn't; it was a shame to trample it, he said.

The corn was cut in the next field and the shorn stubble stood thickly up like three-day whiskers; in the last pasture, a browse of cows swinging, stilting with milk, watched lake-eyed and lazy as we trudged down the bank to the stream beyond. Some nut trees, delicate as fans, screened the little pool below the waterfall; a kingfisher streaked upstream, an electric-blue flash, too quick to point at.

Taff began to sing as we vaulted a green fence and pushed through the bushes to the open bank of the pool. His brother was in the army and had taught him *Country Girls are Fine* and other rude songs when he came on leave.

He broke off before I got a look at the water; then I moved forward to see what he was staring at. There were two girls standing shoulder-deep in the middle of the pool, sleek and wet as otters in the sun. I noticed two neat mounds of clothes on the grass. Taff snorted and threw down his rods.

" Oi! " he said. " You're bathing in our fishing place! "

The taller girl put her arms up and smoothed back her long seal-brown mermaid's tresses.

" No," she said. " You want to fish in our bathing place! "

The other, younger girl, with hair like the uncut corn we'd walked through, had drawn shyly behind the bigger girl.

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" Oh, don't be bloody stupid," cried Taff. " Come on out o it now, else I'll go and tell Old Man Padgett."

Quick, bold, and brassy, the girl stood upright so that th swirling water reached only to her waist; crystal runnels fron her shoulders coursed down her bare brown body, through th channel of her breasts, and over the even spokes of her ribs. had never seen a girl like that before. I forgot to be shocked.

" Old Man Padgett's our dad," she called defiantly. " Yo can go and see what he says if you like. They're cutting ove yonder."

" Oh, damn," Taff swore. " That's done it. No peace an quiet, no fishing, and a whole bloody afternoon wasted."

" You'd be a lot better off if you stopped swearing and cam in for a swim," said the girl in a different tone. " You look al hot and bothered standing there."

" That's a good idea," I said, for something to say.

" Oh, he's got a tongue, has he? " said the girl. " Tell him t stop glaring and come in for a dip," she called to me, still standin up in the water. I didn't realise I was staring, glass-eyed, like teddybear. " And stop staring, will you? I can tell you've go no sisters."

" W-we haven't any costumes," I said.

" Neither've me and our Lil here. What's the matter? Yo shy? All the village lads round here bathe in the raw. If you'v got anything to be ashamed of you'd better keep your trousers o and have a paddle."

Taff listened with his mouth open; he gave me a long, slo look. " I'm bloody dreaming," he said, " or else it's sunstroke There's none of them like this in Cardiff."

" Me and our Lil 'll turn round till you're in the water," sai the girl, " if you're going to die of blushes."

They giggled, splashed water at one another, and dog-paddle towards the opposite bank. I began to take off my shirt; ther was a red V burnt on my chest and my pale arms were onl three-quarters tanned.

" You look as though you've still got your shirt on," said Taff He was an even brown all over when he slipped out of his clothes We stood naked on the bank.

" Come on, who's in first? "

" Let's go together. One—two—three! "

Legs flying, we leapt into the pool. The sun had taken th chill off the water; it was warm as a surprise. We stood up blowing like surfacing whales, the prickling, uncomfortable da at once dissolved into a silk-smooth sensation of pleasure.

The girls flopped over to join us. We exchanged names in th

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middle of the pool; the big girl was called Nancy. They went to a boarding school for girls and they were on holiday for about the same length of time as us; not long enough.

I forget how old I was. I know I had a few pimples and at church the vicar used to glare at me like a brass eagle when I reached for top notes that weren't there any more.

Lil was about my age and less well developed than her sister. When they scrambled out of the water together, and stood side by side to dive in from the flat waterfall ledge, I could see the difference in their bodies, the absence of curve and roundness in the younger girl, the sticks of her thighs not yet firm in their flesh.

Nancy was mature and beautiful: the proud buds of her breasts, her slender arms, and the scythes of her thighs called out the thrust of youth. She was standing partly in the shade of a tree that patterned its leaves and lines on her toast-coloured body, adding depth under her breasts, highlighting the breathy rise and fall of her muscular belly.

They leapt into the water again with a splash like a launching.

His soaked hair sticking out at the back of his hammer-head like the claw that pulls out nails, Taff clambered up the bank and scampered round to the waterfall.

"Not that way," called Nancy. "You'll get stung. The king-nettles were up to our breeches when we tried yesterday."

Taff ran round the other way and stood on the ledge; he thumped his hairy chest and yodelled wildly. "Look at me. I'm Tarzan!"

"Go on. You look more like a monkey," cried Nancy. "Why don't you wrap your tail round a branch and swing on it, you shameless thing?"

Taff looked down.

"You'd be surprised if I did," he said.

All that long happy afternoon we frolicked and splashed, trumpeting and hooting like a water carnival of elephants. We swam races and had a diving contest; played submarines to see who could stay down the longest; fought and wrestled over a tennis ball at water polo; and with Lil mounted on Taff's back and me astride Nancy, we spurred and sparred as knights on horseback until we all fell apart in a lunge and flurry of flailing limbs.

We climbed out of the water and flopped on the hot grass to dry in the sun.

I remembered my sandwiches and apples; there was one of each for each. We munched the food lying on our backs and making pictures with the tracery of leaves against the deep dolly-bag-blue of the sky.

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"There's some fags in my dress pocket," said Nancy. "Throw it over, Lil."

There were three crumpled cigarettes. Nancy broke one in two and gave Lil and me half each; she rolled over and over on the grass, came to rest against Taff's body and lit a cigarette for him. They lay close together, smoking and whispering.

I felt grown up, lying on my bare belly, smoking with a wet-haired naked slip of a girl; I knew my mother would have forty fits if she could see me now. The grass tickled my navel and made me want to smile inside. I felt brave and kissed Lil on the neck, the throat, the wet peach of her cheek, and finally her fresh red lips. She kissed me back, older than her body. My head was light; it was postman's knock, spin the bottle, truth-dare-and-promise all rolled into one mad, improbable, daring afternoon.

Nancy and Taff were watching us and laughing.

"You been seeing too many pictures," he said.

I blushed, and felt that he had made me look silly.

I stared hard at the grass; a bit of twig caught me on the side of the head.

"Go on," said Taff. "I was only kidding."

"We made a hideout in the corn yesterday," said Nancy. "Come on, I'll show it to you."

"What about these two?" asked Taff.

"Oh, we'll be all right," I told him. "Carry on, if you want to go off on your own."

Nancy took Taff's hand and they went through the trees towards the cornfield.

"Aren't they going to put any clothes on?" I said.

"It doesn't matter," said Lil. "There's nobody round here for miles, apart from the cutters in Twelveacre Patch."

"But it's not decent," I said. "They've got nothing on."

"Neither have we," she reminded me.

We smoked the ends of our fags right down till they singed our lips, laughed at ourselves, and kissed.

Then Lil closed her eyes and lay back with her arms pillowed behind her head. Her armpits were smooth and bare as the rest of her body, only peach-fuzzed as yet with the ripening bloom of young womanhood. Her hair, I decided, was softer than uncut corn; it was more like pussy-willows—short, fluffy, and blowing dull pollen-yellow.

I looked at her curiously. She was a supple study in brown: drying in the sun, she smelt like sweet oatmeal biscuits; and her body shone honeygold. Her young chest had the beginning, the promise of fullness, the swelling crowned by the brown berries of her small, smooth nipples.

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I pulled a long quill of feathergrass and tickled her on the arm; she smiled, sleepy in the sun.

The grass tickled a trail down the velvet course of her body, moving the length of one side to her ankle and journeying in reverse along the other leg, over her thigh and belly, back to her gentle breast, her upstretched arm, and graceful neck, easing her, teasing her into berry-hard awareness.

She opened her eyes. "Oh, stop it now."

We kissed again.

"Do you shave?" asked Lil.

"Twice a week," I lied, knowing it was once a fortnight. "Taff says they're not real whiskers yet. He says if I put a bit of butter on them, the cat would lick them off."

"Do you both go to the same school?"

"Yes, but he's a form higher than me."

"What do you like best at school?"

"English," I said, "then geography and biology."

"Our nature study mistress tells us all about sex," said Lil. "She goes out with a fireman."

Under the low overhanging trees, a willow crying on my shoulder, I lay back in silence to ponder the significance of this.

The sun's heat had been steadily diminishing as it sank lower towards the parched horizon, yet its rays were still strong as they pushed through the delicate branches of the nut trees above and around us. Lanterns of gnats, dancing dizzily, were beginning to form under the shadier branches, and birds that had been stunned into silence in the baking afternoon began to stir and try a few notes.

Lil and I lay listening in the cradle of one another's arms as though we had been sweethearts all our lives, close as a minute to twelve. A little breeze played through the grass and quite suddenly the afternoon was cool as a dockleaf.

"Let's put something on before we get chilly," said Lil.

I put on my shirt and trousers and Lil slipped her cotton vest over her shoulders and tucked it into her navy-blue knickers. The magic of the afternoon seemed to vanish as we put on our clothes; we were just an ordinary boy and girl again, sitting on a bank in the sun, fidgeting the time away.

Taff and Nancy appeared on the other side of the pool and waved. They skittered across the bank of shingle where the shallow water careened over the dappled stones, and walked up the bank. "You've been a long time," I said.

"Oh, er—yes," said Taff. "We got lost in the corn." He struck a music-hall pose and proclaimed, "We tried to make love in the cornfield, but it went against the grain."

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I think he had been brought up differently from me.

" Shut up, will you? " said Nancy, thumping him as hard as thistledown. Lil was combing her hair, letting it dry in the sun.

Safe in my clothes, pretending to pick a splinter out of my finger, I watched Nancy dressing.

Like Taff she was an even but lighter brown all over; the slim blades of her thighs, tanned shoulders, and deep breasts glowing with colour, her skin unblemished and golden. She drew a pair of knickers, like Lil's, up her legs, slipped on a pretty cottonprint frock and was dressed. I was surprised she wore nothing else; she was even barefoot.

" Lend us your comb, Lil, when you've finished."

Lil threw the comb across to her sister and put on a pair of sandals.

" Well, I suppose it's time we were off," said Taff.

" Yes, and us," said Nancy. " Do you want to come again? "

" Not 'alf," said Taff eagerly. " Can we? "

" Course. But not tomorrow. The day after. Make it Thursday for sure. Bring some things for a picnic. We can put some pop to cool in the stream while we swim and explore and play games."

" Smashing," said Taff.

We crossed the fields together, holding hands and promising; kissed at the stile and parted as though one day was for ever.

" I like you ever so much," I said to Lil.

Her pointed, elfin face freckled into a brown-eyed smile. " We'll stand them at knights on horseback next time," she said. " We'll knock 'em for six on Thursday."

Taff was in fine form as we marched down the lane to the bus stop. He sang *Country Girls are Fine*, conducting and doing tricks with his bundle of fishing rods, prancing up and down and throwing them into the air like a drum major in front of a parade.

The embers of the sun shone through the charcoal mass and burnt shadows of Shuddery Wood, gathering the cloak of its silent secrets about it for another night. In the orange and red of the shepherd's-delight sky a few pairs of rooks homed towards the treetops, tear-winged and tattered against the thin smoke of the first evening clouds.

Defiantly singing just a bit louder as we passed it, we pretended we didn't give a damn.

From the hedgebank by the bus stop I gathered a bunch of wild flowers—hedge roses, honeysuckle, kittens'-eyes, peppony, and ladies' needlework—for my mother. I was tying them in my handkerchief as the bus came rattling along the lane.

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" I hope it isn't Shorty's bus," said Taff.

It wasn't.

We sat on the back seat with our knees up and rode happily owards home.

" Did you enjoy this afternoon, Taff? " I said. " Better than shing, I mean? "

" Oh, it was smashing," he said. " I can't wait for Thursday."

" Nor me."

" Don't go and blow the gaff we've been swimming naked with irls, or they might not let us go again."

" As if I would! "

Taff rooted in his pocket for three pennies.

" Had any bites? " asked the conductor, noticing the tackle.

Taff inclined his head towards me; I knew that slice of a grin.

" I don't know about 'im," he said as he took the tickets, but I had a bit of a nibble."

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★ From the Author:

Connell Christopher Bernard,
Twenty-eight, not long married;
Staffordshire-born,
Shropshire-raised.

Plays cool piano,
Writes music for top television orchestras,
Studied under conductor Julius Harrison.
Assets: Wife, sense of humour,
and fourteen country uncles,
All writer's dream-material.

Has stupefying knowledge of
Herbs and herbaries,
British birds
and World War II.

Hobbies: poetry-writing,
(it'll never sell!)
Gardening.
Is argumentative,
aggressive,
friendless,
prone to lose temper on buses,
Teetotal and non-smoker.

Likes fishing, judo, the seashore,
The feel of old buildings,
Observing and avoiding,
People.

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MINETTE

Flaming Frenchies were as bad as nattering canaries

BY JOAN AIKEN

THE largest thing in the tiny kitchen was the refrigerator, an the next largest was Harry Makins, the bus conductor, sittin in the zinc bathtub, steam-wreathed and pink, with the thic undergrowth on his chest all out of curl, singing softly to himsel as he cut his toenails in a leisurely manner and placed the trim mings in a china dish ornamented with rosebuds.

His bath stood in front of the grate, and above him, ranged o red velvet, pictures of Makins grandparents and second cousin smiled stiff tallowy smiles. A kettle hummed on the hob.

Mr. Makins deposited the last toenail and was on the point of careful emergence from the bath when footsteps pattered outsid the backdoor and his wife's voice called, " It's only me, Harry Wait till you see what Susie's given us."

Mr. Makins rose with dignity from the steamy rocking wate and draped himself in a towel. He was a square-faced, hairy stocky man who had been in the navy for thirty years and sti wore his British Transport uniform trousers as if they wer bell-bottoms.

" Well? " he said admonishingly. " What's that scatty siste of yours come up with now? "

Mrs. Makins hung up her coat and scanned herself briefly in th mirror. Years of keeping her complexion nice for Harry on hi leaves had left her with grey-pink cheeks, hollow, but soft an smooth as well-rolled dough. A pair of eyes as uncompre hendingly sad as a lemur's stared briefly back at her before sh stepped into the passage outside and reappeared with a larg carton. When she put it down on the table a loud sweet chirru came suddenly and startlingly from inside it.

" Come on, get some clothes over your great self and you ca see what's in it," she scolded. " Standing about in the kitche mother-naked! And it's a female, too," she added obscurely

A female? Her husband directed a suspicious stare at the bo before taking his conductor's uniform, which had been warming i front of the grate, and stumping off regretfully to the cold upstair

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When he came down the carton had gone. A fine large bird-cage hung on the wall; in it, silent now but sharply, observantly turning its head from side to side, perched a small yellow bird.

Pleased, eager, tremulous, Mrs. Makins stood beside the cage. "There! Isn't she lovely! See her little feet? See her bright eyes? And guess what Susie's taught her to say! Come on, my precious," she adjured the bird, "say what Auntie Susie taught you. Sweet, sweetums, then!"

Mr. Makins was affronted. A childless man, he was unaccustomed to baby-talk and he found it silly. Worse was to come. The canary suddenly put its head on one side and in a hoarse, sweet voice, like that of some grotesque, tiny mannequin, chirped out, "Hullo, Harry Makins!"

"There!" said Lil fondly. "Anniversary present for us. Isn't she sweet? Isn't she a duck?"

Harry was still standing and staring at the cage without a word. Slowly an anxious, uncertain expression began to grow in Lil's eyes. "You do like it, don't you, love?" she asked.

"Of course I do," said Harry hastily and loyally. He put an arm round her shoulders. "Smashing present. Whatever will Susie think of next?"

"Hullo, Harry Makins!" the canary sang out again, strident and sweet as a carillon.

"Will it do that all day long?" said Harry uneasily.

"I shouldn't wonder. When it gets used to us. It'll be company for me when you're off on the buses."

"Of course it will," said Harry, guilty in his relief at the thought of escaping from the overbearing chirrup into his single-decker. "Course it will, dear."

Harry always came in from morning shift at half past one. He was a strict teetotaller, and never lingered at the pub on his way home. In a few days, however, he found himself envying the other men, loitering at the door of the White Rose to exchange

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a last word before entering his kitchen—which resounded with sweet shrill squawks like tropical dawn on the films—and Lil's silly phrases of endearment.

Only during the afternoon was there a bit of peace. Lil always slept on her bed for two hours after dinner, and Harry either accompanied her upstairs and lay companionably reading beside her or, on a fine day, rocked and smoked outside the backdoor. The canary's cage was covered with a blue cloth and gave out no sound save a subdued scraping and twittering until at five o'clock Mrs. Makins came downstairs to get the tea and send her husband off on his evening shift.

Mr. Makins was a great reader. While Lil snored and dreamt under the white counterpane in the afternoon sun, his library books took him far away, buffeting over strange seas, wading desert sands, or into the glimmering reaches of the past. He was particularly fond of historical romances, and always asked Lil, who did the choosing at the public library, to get him something with swords in it if she could. At the first "On guard," Mr. Makin's spirit would spring erect as quivering steel.

"Nice book?" Lil asked, and moved yawning past him to put on the kettle.

"Not so bad. No swords yet, but it's historical. Real people, Charles the First and that lot."

"What, him who had his head cut off?" she said idly.

"It's a bit sad," Mr. Makins muttered, more to himself than aloud. "Things like that in the past, you can't do nothing about them." Rousing, he asked, "Did you have any dreams this afternoon?" He always asked this question at teatime.

"Oh yes. Yes, I did." Lil began to laugh, though her sad eyes preserved their questioning inwardness. "I dreamt that you fell in love. Regular head over heels with some young snip of a girl."

"Dreams go by opposites, they say," Harry remarked warily.

"Let's hope so. Something else there was, too—" she sought, frowning, in memory, her teacup balanced on the edge of her saucer. "Yes, that was it. Going to the White Rose, you were, for a bottle of brandy. *Brandy!*"

"Here, hold on, Lil," protested her husband. "Who d'you think you're dreaming about? What did I want the brandy for?"

"For her."

"Who?"

"This young girl. She was dying."

Harry held his breath. Then, making an effort, he said boldly, "The brandy soon put that right, I bet."

"You won't ever really bring home any brandy, will you,

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Harry? The very smell of the stuff turns me sick right away."

"You know I wouldn't, you daft thing. Hey, look at the time, this won't get the baby bathed. I must be off." Mr. Makins clapped his conductor's cap on his head, gave his wife a hasty kiss, and swung out of the door. But as he walked down the cobbled lane his face was creased with a preoccupied frown. Brandy, he thought. Falling in love with a young girl. What worse fortunes might Lil's dreams have in store for him?

The daily twittering irritation of the canary, and his wife's besotted fondness for it, were forgotten in this new anxiety. For Mr. Makins had long since discovered, though he never mentioned it to Lil, that anything she dreamt about him ultimately came to pass. Once he had had to live through three months of sweating suspense until one of the old single-deckers crashed into the garage wall beside him as she had dreamt it would.

With great difficulty, on the grounds that it would upset her to hear about it, Harry had persuaded his mates not to mention the near-accident to Lil; he trembled to think how she would worry if she realised her strange power of prognostication. He had managed to conceal the other odd scraps of dreams-come-true: the purse he found in the street, the letter from overseas, the time he cut himself on the chopper. Lil was nervous enough anyway—though she did seem happier with the canary in the house, seemed to be making a proper pet of it. Blasted bird!

Mr. Makins slapped his ticket punch irritably on the bus office counter. He wasn't even allowed to have his bath in the kitchen now, because Lil didn't think it was nice with the bird there watching, and so he had to stagger upstairs to the bedroom with buckets full of water.

"It's no different from a child," he grumbled. "If we had a nipper you wouldn't mind his seeing me in the bath."

"Harry! How can you say such a thing?" Lil's eyes filled with tears and he felt bad; shouldn't have mentioned children.

The bird was allowed to flutter loose about the house, and Harry took a slightly wicked pleasure in teaching it to come when he whistled, and trying to persuade it to fly up to the bedroom when he was in the tub there. But as yet it had refused to come more than halfway up the stairs.

"Excursion this afternoon," grumbled Ted, his driver, coming up behind him. "Remember? Upham Park with a pack of Frenchies."

Harry's disgust was profound. Flaming Frenchies, he felt, were about as bad as nattering canaries. With stony disapproval he watched them all climb on to the bus—thirty silly girls,

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skirts far too short, cropped hair flying about their eyes, jabbering away nineteen to the dozen. Why did they want to come to England anyway?

Resentfully he unwound an immense reel of tickets amid delighted squeaks and oh-là-là's; then hunched himself at the back of the bus, taking no further part in the business.

But when they came to Upham Park, and the French girls had all scattered, waving their hands and calling to each other over the old Tudor house, Mr. Makins found the silence and the sunlight and the green splashes of trees against grey stone too productive of thought. He began to brood and remember, to think of old griefs, and of Lil's dreams, and of that perishing canary.

Presently, whistling, he climbed down from the bus, flipped a casual hand at Ted, who was smoking over an evening paper in the front seat, and strolled off to where they sold the tickets. Half a crown! There must be a lot to look at!

Peering into the cool gloom he found first a hall with bits of armour and things in glass cases, then a huge oak staircase, then a room full of portraits. No one else was there, and he wandered round, staring at the varnished faces across which sunlight fell in golden lozenges, fetching out here a heavy-lidded seventeenth-century eye, there a proud mouth, there a hand drooping under lace ruffles.

One face particularly caught Harry's attention: that of a young girl with fair hair sleeked back into ringlets, a pointed face, and wistful eyes. What was she looking at so sadly, so fixedly? He found himself turning, staring over his shoulder to follow the direction of her gaze. She seemed to be staring at a portrait of Charles II, black-haired and saturnine as any film star, with his deep-grooved cheeks.

And then Harry noticed that beneath the girl's portrait was a label which said,

MINETTE, YOUNGER SISTER OF CHARLES II

The name was familiar from his reading. But why should she watch her elder brother so wistfully? Left out, perhaps, thought Harry—for Charles' eyes, sidelong, were full on Louise de Kéroualle who smiled along the wall to his right.

"It's no good, Minette," Harry found himself whispering, almost aloud. "He won't play with you just now." But the expression in her eyes was so forlorn that, absurdly, he felt a great choking lump in his throat. He wanted to say, Never mind, dearie, tell Father all about it. Father'll help. Which was strange, for he had never felt like a parent before. But then she, Minette, poor girl, had hardly had a father.

"Going clean daft," Harry admonished himself, and turned to

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leave, taking a last look at the sumptuous oak panelling, the gilt fittings, the stillness and splendour. A grand place to live, if you weren't shut in there.

A couple of French girls hurried past him, twittering. "Depêche-toi, alors! On s'en va, tout de suite . . ."

He had better hurry, too. But he lingered a moment longer and saw another of the girls run in and pause before the portrait of Minette. Something arrested and birdlike about her appearance caught his eye; he looked again and saw that she was using the portrait as if it were a mirror, setting her ringlets straight, smoothing the sleek hair above her brows. And she might have been the portrait's twin!

He felt impelled to speak.

"Could—could you tell me the time, miss?" he asked.

She turned, and at once he knew who she was. Recognition flowed between them. "You're prettier than the picture," he said.

She smiled a little, spreading her hands. "You are so kind! Alas, I cannot tell you the time. I have no clock." She had a charming slight accent.

"It doesn't matter," Mr. Makins said. "Perhaps—perhaps there is something I could do for you?" They looked at each other: a long, candid look, that of old friends, or young lovers.

"You must always give her your heart," a contemporary courtier had written. But how can you give your heart to the past? She too, though, had known the poverty of ineffectual love.

She said, "Could you, perhaps, come to see me? I am a little lonely here."

"I'll come whenever I can," Mr. Makins promised.

She smiled again, raised her hand in a graceful, accomplished gesture, and moved through a door into the next room. Slowly he walked in the other direction. Even now he could not believe what had happened. When he reached the bus he counted the chattering French cargo, thirty of them, all aboard again. But nowhere among them was a small, slight girl with fair ringlets. And then he really knew, and his heart began to ache.

At home, the kitchen was unwontedly dark. He found Lil in the little-used front room, crying by the photograph of their Emmy, who had died at six weeks.

"What's the matter, love?" he said anxiously. "Not feeling bad, are you?"

"It's not me, Harry, it's the bird. She's had a queer turn. Oh, I know you don't set so much store by her as I do. I just don't know what I'll do if that bird dies."

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Now Harry realised why the house seemed so queerly silent. He carefully inspected the bird, lying with closed eyes and heaving tiny chest in a cardboard box lined with cotton wool.

"What she wants is a drop of brandy," he said at length. "That might do the trick. Don't cry, Lil. I'll pop round and get some. And if it doesn't help her, well, I promise I'll get you another bird. I believe I should miss her racket about the place, and that's a fact."

Lil gave him a watery smile as he found a coffee essence bottle and went softly out the backdoor.

The brandy did the trick. Not all at once; but after three or four drops had been trickled, at half-hourly intervals, down the canary's throat, she suddenly opened one bright eye and fixed a strangely familiar look on Mr. Makins, standing anxiously by her with the dropper in his hand.

"I think she'll do now," he said, breathing heavily with relief.

"Oh, Harry! Clever boy! Isn't she a little duck," Lil said softly, looking down at the yellow bird stirring gently in her box.

"Well, I'll go and have a bath," Harry said, sighing. He hoped that Lil would suggest he could have it in the kitchen, but she did not; only helped him carry up the water, and then returned to her rapt contemplation of the reviving bird.

Presently—"She's flying again, Harry!" she called up the stairs.

"Smashing." Harry rather gloomily soaped his chest. He felt flat, and horribly sad, as if some wonderful occurrence had passed him by. I must have dreamt it, he thought. Stopped in the bus, very likely, and dreamt the whole thing.

But just the same he would go back to look at the portrait next time there was an excursion to Upham Park.

Suddenly he heard a flirt of wings, saw a flash of yellow, and the canary was in the room with him. A tap, the faintest scrape of claws on metal, and she was perching on the zinc bath handle, fixedly regarding him. He held his breath. He hardly dared move, so strange, so recognising was the look she gave him from her bright eye.

"Well, I'm danged," he whispered.

And the canary whispered back, no louder than the rustle of a heartbeat, "Hullo, Harry Makins."

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★ ★ ★

WHERE THERE'S AN INCH THERE'S AN ELLE

If you give a woman an inch she'll park a car in it.
The Chief Constable of Gloucestershire

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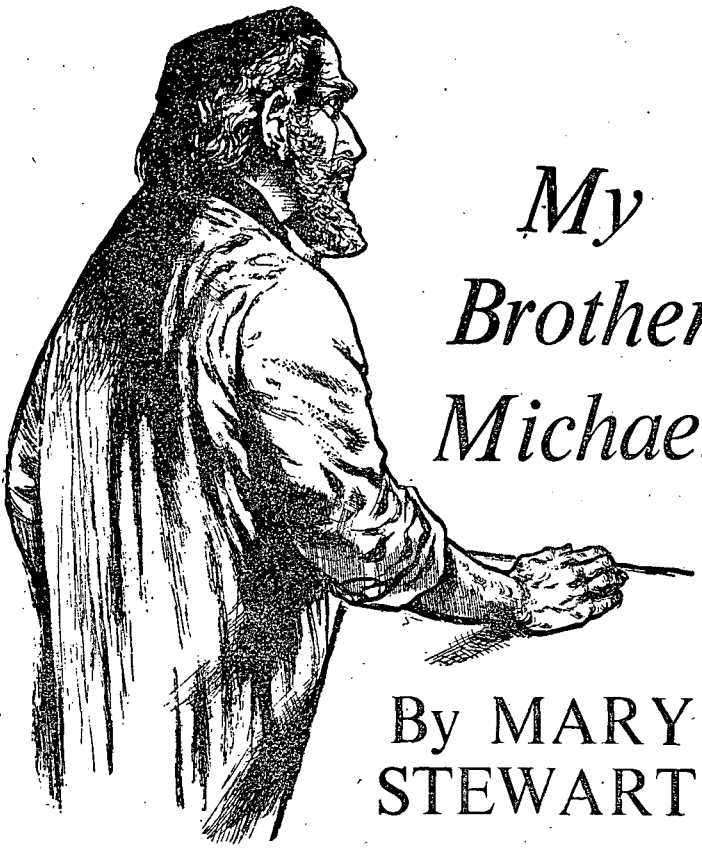

My Brother Michael

By MARY STEWART

It was from Stephanos, the old Greek shepherd, that Simon Lester and I, Camilla Haven, learnt the brutal facts of his brother Michael's murder on Parnassus in 1944 at the hands of the traitor Angelos, leader of the ELAS guerillas to which Michael Lester was attached as British Liaison Officer. The faithful Stephanos guided us from Delphi, where Simon and I were staying, to a high corrie and led us to the cairn he had set to mark the scene of the murder. In a great cave in the corrie we discovered Angelos' stolen hoard of British arms and gold, and in hidden beauty at the heart of a sealed inner cave we came upon the secret of "the bright citadel" of Michael's last letter—the surpassingly-lovely statue of Apollo.

And now Simon and I, in acute danger from Angelos and his cousin Dimitrios, are caught in the same web of violence that had

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destroyed Michael . . . Powerless to warn Simon, who has gone in search of Dimitrios, I cower in terror in a shadowed cleft near the tortured body of the young artist Nigel as Angelos enters the cave; and to him comes the seductive, malevolent Danielle.

ANGELOS' voice was pitched low.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

Danielle had stopped at the edge of the torchlight. She looked at once younger and prettier than I had seen her. She had on the turquoise blouse and scarlet cotton skirt, and her haste had flushed her face and hurried her breathing, making her seem less cynically in control of herself. She hadn't looked at Angelos.

Her eyes were riveted on what remained of the cache of boxes: the wartime hoard of British arms and British gold dropped to the Resistance, but stashed secretly away by the traitor Angelos for his own use; the cache that Michael Lester had come upon in the cave a short while before he met his death.

"So that's it." Like Angelos, Danielle spoke in French.

"That's it." He regarded her sourly. "I told you last night I'd found it again, didn't I? So why the devil didn't you do as you were told and stay out of sight till I came for you?"

She walked forward slowly while he was speaking, her eyes still on the stuff at his feet. Now she looked up under her lashes with that provocative gamine grin. "I wanted to see for myself what was going on. Don't be angry—nobody saw me come."

"Did you see Dimitrios on your way up?"

She shook her head. She was stooping over the pile, prodding with a toe at the broken box that showed the gleam of gold. I saw her breasts rise and fall quickly as if with excitement.

He swore, striking the spade savagely into the stones. "Then where the hell is he? I came by the high route—it's shorter if you know your road. And if you didn't see him either—"

"I came by the high route, too." Again that smiling look up through the lovely lashes. "How did you think I found my way here? I waited where I thought you'd come, then followed you."

He grunted. "Clever, eh? Then that means he's gone down the other track to look for me. Blast the man; he's as jumpy as a bean on a griddle, and about as much use. And you—I told you I didn't want you up here."

She laughed. "Maybe I didn't trust you, Angelos. Maybe you wouldn't have come for me."

He gave a short laugh. "Maybe."

"Well, I wanted to see *this*," she said, almost childishly, "and besides, I didn't want to hang about down there all day with that damned jeep."

"Why? The stuff's not in it."

"No, but—"

"Did you park it where I told you?"

"Of course I did. Angelos, why d'you have to do this in daylight? You're crazy."

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"I know what I'm doing. There's next to no moon just now, and this country's murder with a mule on a black night, and I daren't use a light. There'll be nobody about between here and the place where I'm stacking the stuff, and we can ferry the whole lot from there to the jeep in a couple of hours after dusk." He added, with a sort of heavy irony, "Provided, of course, that you do as you're told, and that my cool-headed cousin, Dimitrios, gets back in time to give me a bit of help with the hard work!"

She laughed. She had recovered her breath now, and with it her own particular brand of throaty charm. She straightened up and gave him one of her long-lidded glinting looks.

"Well, I can help instead, can't I? You won't send me back now? Don't you think, Angelos mou, that you might pretend to be a little bit pleased to see me?" She moved up close to him as she spoke, and he pulled her to him and kissed her in a way that managed to be perfunctory and yet lustful.

I saw her press her thin body against him and her hands crept up to move among the thick curls on the back of his head.

I drew back a little in my crevice, shutting my eyes momentarily as if against this new discovery. *Angelos* her lover. *Angelos*. Through the whirl of fear and confusion the facts twisted and readjusted themselves into a different pattern.

It had been Angelos, not Dimitrios, who had scraped acquaintance with Danielle on those long afternoons at Itea; this deliberately, not only to while away the boredom of inaction, but because her jeep could be used to shift the guns and the gold to the coast, whereas to hire other transport would involve inquiries later and provoke the very gossip the cousins had to avoid.

And by the same token it had been Angelos, not Dimitrios, who had broken into the Delphi studio last night and attacked Simon. I remembered now, quite clearly, that the hand which had reached back for the torch had not had a torn thumb. And I remembered Danielle's little smile when I had so swiftly identified her lover as Dimitrios . . .

Angelos pushed her away, not too gently. "You know damned well you shouldn't have come. There's no room in the games I play for anyone with nerves."

She was lighting a cigarette. She said almost snappishly, "It wasn't nerves; it was curiosity—and I've a right to know what's going on after what I've done for you! You'd never have the jeep but for me, and I got you the tools and the mule on Tuesday night.

"And I've played spy on the English schoolmaster, Simon Lester, and that wretched tourist girl, Camilla, he's taken in tow. All you do is walk into my bedroom in the studio at Delphi last night, stay with me half an hour, and tell me damn-all except that today's the day and I'm to get the jeep to the quarry. And you expect that to be that! You might have landed me in the hell of a jam last night, but you never said a word to me!"

"What d'you mean?" He was working again, levering at a solid lump of rock that was wedging down a couple of boxes. The

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dislodged dirt and small stones hissed to the floor. He seemed hardly to be listening to her.

She said sharply, "You know quite well what I mean. When you came to my room last night, you said you hadn't seen Nigel, and—"

"Nigel?"

"The English boy—the artist. He was throwing out hints on Tuesday night about getting rich and famous, and he was drunk. After the others had left I gave him another couple of ouzos and took him for a walk. Did I tell you that?"

She was watching the man through the wisping smoke of her cigarette, and her tone was provocative. He neither looked up nor took the slightest notice.

She tapped ash off with a sharply pettish movement. "Well? It was obvious he'd found something up here on Parnassus. You said you were going to wait for him yesterday and find out what it was, and where—"

"So what? We didn't need to, did we? Old Stephanos came with your English friends and that showed us the way."

"They showed you the cave, too?"

He laughed shortly. "Hardly. If they'd found the cave yesterday we'd not have been able to get near it now for troops three deep round the door!"

She moved impatiently. "I didn't mean that way. Of course Simon and Camilla didn't find it, or they wouldn't have said they'd be trailing off to Levadia today. But you *did* find it pretty quickly, didn't you? Dimitrios told me at the Shining Ones that you'd found the place, and that you were working on it then while he came down to do some final clearing up."

Angelos had laid aside the crowbar, and was using the spade to shift some of the smaller debris. The thud of digging echoed dully. He didn't look up. He said, "The landslide changed everything—removed all the old landmarks—but when Stephanos guided them to the cairn and showed them the spot where I broke Michael's neck I knew then just where the cave must be. Everything was changed but I knew the narrow inlet must open on the cave. I couldn't get through it the way it was, so after I'd sent Dimitrios down I got to work and opened it up."

Danielle wasn't, as usual, letting the cigarette hang from her lips as she talked. She was smoking in jerky movements that spoke of tightly-strung nerves. She said, making it sound like an accusation, "But you haven't explained about Nigel."

He straightened up from his work, eyeing her, his head thrust forward like a bull's, his look at once formidable and wary. The fixed half-moon smile on the thick mouth was in its own way terrifying. He said roughly, "Come off it. What is all this? Why the hell should I have to explain?"

She blew a long plume of smoke, then said flatly, "When you left me last night, you went to Nigel's room. Why?"

"That's simple enough, isn't it? You'd told me he'd done a drawing of me as like as a photograph. I wanted to destroy it."

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"But he'd cleared out—packed up and gone. You knew that. I'd told you that. I'd been in myself that evening to try to find the drawing, and all his stuff was gone. He'd taken it with him."

"Oh no," said Angelos, "he hadn't."

"What d'you mean? You never saw him. How d'you know what he had on him?"

She stopped. I saw her eyes widen as they met his look. Her lips parted so that the cigarette fell to the ground and lay there smouldering. She ignored it. She was staring at him.

Angelos was standing still, leaning on the spade, watching her. I could see sweat on the heavy face, on his hairy forearms.

He said again, softly, "Well?"

Her voice was shaken clear of any of its carefully-affected overtones. It came clear and thin, like a little girl's. "You did see him? Yesterday? He *did* tell you where the cave was?"

"Yes, we saw him. But he didn't tell us anything. I told you the truth about that."

"Then—then—why did you lie about seeing him?"

The smile deepened as the thick lips parted. "You know why. Don't you?"

There was a long pause.

I saw the pink tongue come out to flick once, quick as a lizard's, across her pale lips. "You—killed him? Nigel?"

No reply. He didn't stir. I saw her throat muscles move as she swallowed. There was no horror or regret or fear in her face; it was blank of expression, with parted lips, and wide eyes fixed on the man. But her breathing hurried. "I—see. You didn't tell me."

His voice was soft, almost amused. "No, I didn't tell you. I didn't want to scare you away."

"But I don't understand. Didn't he know about the cave?"

"He knew; you can be sure of that. But he didn't tell us. We tried, but he wouldn't come clean with anything that made sense."

She swallowed again. She hadn't taken her eyes off him. She might have been a waxwork but for the eyes and the convulsive muscles of the throat. "Did you have to kill him?"

He shrugged his heavy shoulders. "We didn't, in a manner of speaking. The bloody little pansy died on us. A pity."

His head sank lower. The smile seemed to thicken. "Well? Scared? Going to scream and run?"

She moved then. She came close to him again, and her hands went up to the breast of his shirt. "Do I look as if I wanted to run, Angelos mou? Would I be the sort you'd want along with you if I had that kind of baby-nerve?"

The hands slid up his shoulders and over them to the back of his neck. She pressed closer. "I know all about you, Angelos Dragoumis. Don't think that I don't. They still tell quite a few stories about you, here in Delphi."

A laugh shook him. "You surprise me."

She pulled his head down, and said, against his mouth, "Do I?

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Does it surprise you to know that that's why I'm here? That that's why I like you?"

He kissed her, lingeringly this time, then thrust her away from him with his free hand. "No. Why should it? I've met women like you before." He still held the spade in his other hand, and now he turned back to his task.

Danielle said, eyeing the broad back a little sulkily, "Where is he?"

"Near enough."

I saw her eyes show white for a moment as she gave a quick over-the-shoulder look into the shadowed corners. Then she shrugged and reached in her pocket for another cigarette. "You may as well tell me what happened."

"All right. Only stand back out of the way. That's better. Well, we waited beside the Delphi track for the boy, but he didn't come. He must have started early and gone some other way round, because the first we saw of him was when he was away beyond us and almost up to these cliffs. We came as close as we could without his seeing us, but when we'd worked our way up that gully that lies east of here, he'd vanished. We climbed up above the line of cliff, and separated; then waited. After a bit we saw him —walking out of the corrie here, as cool as you please. So we came down the cliff and got him."

"Why did you have to do that? The English couple were coming. Once you saw the place where Michael died—"

"A bird in the hand," said Angelos, and I saw the thick grin deepen again. "For all I knew, Stephanos wouldn't remember the exact spot, and it was certain that your artist friend had just come out of some hiding-place. Besides, he'd done that drawing of me. He'd seen me."

She was lighting another cigarette. The flame of the match wasn't quite steady. Her eyes looked wide and brilliant above it.

"What did you do?"

He sounded indifferent. "We tried to scare him into talking at first, but he wouldn't come clean. To tell you the truth I began to think you were wrong and he hadn't found a thing, only then he began to babble about a cave and 'something beyond price' and he was damned if he'd let us touch it. Then we really got going." Angelos straightened up and took out a cigarette. He thrust it between his lips, and leaned forward to get a light from hers.

I thought, I shall see that smile in my dreams . . .

"But he still wouldn't say anything that made sense," said Angelos. "Babbled about water, and some flowers." The contempt in the thick French made the words sound obscene. "My English is fair enough, but I couldn't get all the words. In the end there was something about gold, I'm pretty sure, but just as we were getting to that, he died on us. It looked to me as if he had a groggy heart."

"What happened then?"

"We'd hardly finished with him when we saw Stephanos and

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the boy, Niko, bringing the English couple along. We threw Nigel's body behind some rocks and waited and watched till the old man took them to the corrie and showed them the place. It's altered completely; I might have searched a thousand years.

"As soon as they'd gone, I got down into the corrie and started looking around. It was dead easy. Your Nigel helped us after all with his crazy blathering; there was only one place where grass grew, and flowers, and it was much where I expected the cave to lie, if Stephanos had been accurate.

"We soon saw where the entrance was. Getting into it was another matter, but with the boy dead on our hands we had to be sure there'd be no inquiries until we'd got clear away and no traces left. So I went on with the job alone while I sent Dimitrios down to see you as arranged. I told him not to tell you about Nigel, but to get quietly into the studio and clear the stuff out of his room as if he'd packed up and gone. He did that. You'll find all the boy's stuff in the back of the jeep under the sacking.

"Dimitrios brought a big folder of drawings, but like a fool he was in too much of a hurry to check them, and he never saw that the picture of me wasn't there. It mightn't have mattered, but that's the sort of detail that can sometimes matter the hell of a lot. I'm officially dead, and by God I'm staying that way, and no rumours!"

"Did you find it?"

"No. I hadn't time. There was a lot of paper with the rubbish in a tin on the floor in his room. That fool Dimitrios hadn't thought it worth bothering about. But if in fact that's where the drawings are, nobody's going to take any notice of them. They'll just think he tidied up and left."

"They do. The English couple think he's gone on a trek over the hills—with the mule."

"Do they?" He sounded amused. "Then that's that, isn't it?"

He had cleared the boxes now of their covering of stones. He stooped to work one of them clear of the pile. Danielle watched the play of the great muscles for a few moments in silence. Then she said again, "Where is he?"

"Who?"

"Nigel, of course! Did you just leave him out there in the rocks for the vultures?"

"Not likely. They'd have given us away more quickly than anything else. He's here."

For the first time I saw some strong feeling move her. It was like a spring tensing. "*Here?*"

He jerked his head sideways. "Over there." He prised the box free at last, straightened up, and carried it out of the cave. The torch shone strongly enough from its niche on the pillar.

Danielle stood still, staring towards the dark corner where Nigel's body lay; then, as if with an effort, she walked forward, took the torch from its niche, and went over to the pile of rubble

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that hid the pathetic body. The light shone on what lay, mercifully, beyond my range of vision.

It was at that moment that I remembered my own torch, dropped near Nigel's body. If she saw it . . . if the light from her torch picked up its glint in the dust . . .

Angelos was coming back. He said irritably, "Still no sign. He must have taken one of the small boxes down himself by the lower track. We'd have seen him else." Then he looked across and realised where she was. She still had her back to him. The heavy face watching her didn't change its expression, but something in the look of the eyes made my blood thicken. "Well?"

She turned abruptly, "Are you going to leave him there?"

"Where else? Take him in the jeep to the bay at Galaxidion?"

She ignored the irony. "Aren't you going to bury him?"

"There's no time. I've got enough to do shovelling half Parnassus off this stuff. You can throw some dirt over him if you like, but it hardly matters. Something for you to do while I load up."

Danielle came quickly back into the middle of the cave. "I'm not staying here."

He laughed. "As you wish. I thought you weren't squeamish, ma poule."

"I'm not," she said pettishly, "but can't you see it won't do to leave him here, even if we do cover him? It's obvious already there's been someone at work here, and if anyone does come up they're bound to see—"

"Why should anyone come?"

She hesitated, eyeing him. "The Englishman, Simon—"

"What of him? You told me yourself he'd gone off to Levadia. Of course he knows his brother Michael was murdered. D'you think Stephanos wouldn't tell him that? What difference does it make? Nobody knows *why*."

"But if he suspected you were still alive—"

"Him?" The thick voice held nothing but amused contempt. "In any case, why should he? Nigel's dead, and no one's going to recognise his drawing of me now."

Angelos turned away and lugged another box clear of the pile. "There. That's as much as the mule can take on one trip. Now, forget that nonsense, and give me a hand loading up. Simon Lester's got no reason to come back here. He's been, and seen all he can. Why should he come again? To bring a posy for Michael?" He laughed again, unpleasantly. "By God, I wish he would! I owe him something, after all."

She said, with a sort of spite, "And her. Camilla hit you."

"She did, didn't she?" he said cheerfully. "I think we'll wait till Dimitrios comes. He can't be much longer." He paused, looking round the cave. "It's queer to be back; it looks just the same. Just the same. These pillars, and that bit of rock like a lion's head, and the drip of water somewhere. I never found the spring. Can you hear it?"

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She said impatiently, " But Nigel. You must do something about the body. Can't you see—? "

" You may be right." His voice was almost absent. It was clear that Nigel had long since ceased to matter at all. " In fact he may do us a better turn dead than he did alive. *He* can go over the cliff with the jeep. Yes, here's the water. I thought so. It's over here somewhere."

Danielle's voice stopped him as he moved. There was a note in it that I hadn't heard before. " The jeep? Over the cliff? I didn't know you planned to do that."

" You don't know all I plan to do, my fair lady," he said. He turned back to her as he spoke, and I couldn't see his face. I saw hers. It looked suddenly thinner and sharp, like a frightened urchin's. He said, " What is it now? We have to get rid of the jeep somehow, haven't we? If the boy's found in the sea with it, that accounts for him as well."

Danielle said, almost in a whisper, " It's mine. Everybody knows I brought it up from Athens."

" So what? Everybody'll assume you were in it, too, and that will be that."

Still she didn't move, but stared up at him. She looked very childish in the turquoise top, and scarlet bell of skirt. He went towards her till she had to tilt back her head to look him in the eyes.

He said on a note of impatience, and something else, " What is it now? Scared? "

" No. No. But I was wondering—"

" What? "

She spoke again in that hurried whisper. " What you were going to do with the jeep if you—if you hadn't had Nigel's body to send over the cliffs with it? "

He said slowly, " The same, of course. They'd have thought you were in it and had been—"

He stopped abruptly. Then I heard him laugh. His big hand went slowly out and ran down her bare arm. It looked very dark against her pale olive flesh. There were black hairs on the back of it. " Well, well, well. My poor little pretty, did you really think I'd do a thing like that to you? "

She didn't move. The thin arm hung slack by her side. Her head was tilted back, the big eyes searching his face. She said in that flat little voice, " You said, ' *He* can go over the cliff with the jeep,' as if you'd planned it for someone else. As if—"

He had an arm round her now, and pulled her close to him. She went to him unresisting. His voice thickened. " And you thought I meant you? *You?* My little Danielle? "

" Then who? "

He didn't answer, but I saw her eyes narrow and then flare wide again She whispered, " *Dimitrios?* "

His hand came quickly over her mouth and his body shook as if with a laugh. " Quietly, little fool, quietly! In Greece, the mountains have ears."

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"But, Angelos mou—"

"Well? I thought you said you knew me, my girl? Don't you see? I had to have his help and his boat, but when did *he* earn the half share of a fortune? The stuff's mine, and I've waited fourteen years for it, and now I've got it. D'you think I'm going to share it with anyone?"

"And—what about me?"

He pulled her unresisting body closer to him. He laughed again, deep in his throat. "That's not sharing. You and I, ma poule, we count as one." His free hand slid up her throat, under her chin, then forced her head up so that her mouth met his. "And I still need *you*. Do I have to convince you of that?"

His mouth closed on hers then, avidly, and I saw her stiffen for just a moment as if she was going to resist, then she relaxed against him and her arms went up to his neck. I heard him laugh against her lips, and he said hoarsely, "Over there. Hurry."

I shut my eyes. I turned my head away so that my cheek, like my hands, pressed against the cool rock. It smelt fresh, like rain. I remember that under my left hand there was a little knob of stone the shape of a limpet shell . . .

As I shut my eyes Angelos was kissing her, his hand beginning to fumble with her clothes. She was clinging to him, her body melting towards his, her hands pulling his head down fiercely to meet her kisses. Then I heard him talking, little breathless sentences I couldn't catch—didn't try to catch—in a mixture of Greek and his thick fluent French. I heard him kick a stone out of the way as he pulled her down on to the dusty floor of the cave near the rubble-pile, near Nigel's poor dead body.

I only heard one sound from her, and it was a little half sigh, half whimper of pleasure.

I was shaking, and covered with sweat, and hot as though the chilly cleft was an oven. Under the fingers of my left hand the stone limpet had broken away. I was holding a fragment in my curled fingers, and it was embedded in the flesh, hurting me.

I don't know how long it was before I realised that the cave was quiet, except for the heavy breathing.

Then I heard him getting to his feet. His breathing was heavy and even. He didn't say anything, and I didn't hear him move away. There was no sound from Danielle.

I opened my eyes again, and the dimming torchlight met them. He was standing beside the pile of rubble, smiling down at Danielle. She lay there, still, looking up at him. I could see the glint of her eyes. The sweat on his face made the wide fleshy cheeks gleam like soapstone. He stood smiling down at the girl who lay at his feet staring back at him, her bright skirt all tossed-looking in the dust.

I thought with crazy inconsequence, How uncomfortable she looks. Then, suddenly, She looks dead.

Angelos stooped, took her body by the shoulders, and dragged it across the cave to pitch it down in the rubble beside Nigel.

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And that is how Danielle Lascaux was murdered within twenty yards of me, and I never lifted a finger to help her.

Mercifully, I didn't faint, or I should have pitched straight out into the torchlight. The narrow cleft held my body up, and my mind—numbed I suppose by the repetition of shock—seemed only very slowly to take in what had happened.

I watched him, still in that queer dead trance of calm. He dropped Danielle's body in the dust beside Nigel's, and stood for a moment looking down at them, lightly dusting his hands together.

He turned back now to the pillar where the torch was lodged, reached up a hand, and switched it off. The darkness came down like a lid on a stifling box. He seemed to be listening. I could hear his untroubled breathing, and the tiny rustle of settling dust under the girl's body. There was no sound from outside.

He switched on the light again and went out of the cave. The mule's bridle jingled.

I heard him move off, his soft footsteps unaccompanied by the harper ones of the beast.

The footsteps dwindled steadily. I couldn't hear them any more. I waited, straining my ears.

I had no conscious plan, not even any coherent thought, but I knew I had to get out of that cave to warn Simon.

The sun struck down at me like a bright axe. I put a hand to my eyes, flinching as if at an actual blow. I was blinded, swimming in a sea of light. My other hand, groping out before me, touched something warm and soft that moved. I jerked away with a little gasp of terror and in the same moment I realised that it was the mule, tethered in the narrow corner outside the cave. Its muzzle was deep in the grass, and it hardly paused to roll a white eye back at me before it resumed its eager cropping. The warm ammoniac smell of its coat brought a momentary, comfortless, memory of Niko. I thrust past, ducked heedlessly under the buttress, and ran out into the corrie.

There was no sign of Angelos. I turned and ran for the foot of the cliff-path. The corrie was a well of heat in which nothing moved except me, and I thrust through it blindly, with the whip of panic on me . . . I reached the foot of the cliff. I only knew that I had to get up, out of the hot enclosing walls of rock, out on to the high open stretches above the cliff.

The afternoon sun shone full on the cliff where the path lay. The brightness of white limestone splintered against the eyes. I climbed fast up the steep, twisting little goat-track, trying to make no sound. The dust hissed like sand under my feet. A pebble rolled and fell to the foot of the cliff with a crack like a pistol shot. My breathing was as loud in the still air as sobbing.

I was a little less than halfway up when I heard him coming back. I stopped dead, pilloried against the naked rock, clamped to it like a lizard on the bare stone. The rock burnt through my thin

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dress. As soon as Angelos reached the "gateway"—the break in the great wall of rock on the west of the corrie—he would see me. I couldn't possibly get to the top in time.

There was nowhere to hide. A bare zigzag of goat-track; a couple of steep steps of natural rock open to the sun; a ledge holding a low tangle of brown scrub.

Regardless now of noise, I scrambled anyhow over the rocky steps, pulled myself off the path on to the ledge, and flung myself down behind the meagre shelter of the dead bushes.

There was one small holly-oak, shining green, among a mass of foot-high tufted stuff like a tangle of rusty wire-netting. This was prickly to the touch, but as I dragged myself nearer its shelter, pressing against it, it crumbled under my desperate hands. I remember it seemed quite a natural part of the nightmare that the barrier between me and murder should crumble as I touched it.

I drew back from the dead bushes and pressed myself deep into the dust of the ledge, as if like a mole I could dig myself into the ground for safety. I put my cheek to the hot dust and lay still. Above me an overhang dealt a narrow shade, but where I lay the ledge was exposed to the sun. Through the wiry scrub I watched the corrie below me.

Angelos came up into the gateway and then walked quickly down the ramp and across the corrie. He didn't look up, but made straight for the cave, disappearing from my view in the corner.

I waited, pressed down in the burning dust. He didn't appear, and I couldn't hear anything.

I was just getting ready to move when I saw him again. He came out, looking about him. In his hand he held something that shone in the sunlight. It was the torch I had dropped by Nigel's body. Angelos' own torch that I had found on the studio floor.

The black arched brows were drawn frowning over his eyes. The smile pulled the thick lips. He stopped in the centre of the corrie, turning the torch over in his hand.

I lay still. Invisible, the mule moved restlessly, and metal clinked.

Angelos raised his head and sent one long look round the corrie. It raked the cliff, touched me, passed me by. Then the massive shoulders lifted in a tiny shrug, and he thrust the torch into a pocket of the jacket. I saw him slide his hand into the other pocket and bring out a gun. He weighed this in his hand, thoughtfully, and then turned back towards the cave.

My hands braced themselves in the dust. He would have recognised the torch, no doubt of that. He was going back into the cave to search for whoever had dropped it. And this time I didn't propose to linger till he came out again. I wasn't going to wait here to be brushed off the cliff by that gun like a lizard off a wall.

I felt my muscles tighten up like vibrating wires. He was moving deliberately across the corrie floor. Soon he would be out of sight.

Something fell on to my hand with a sharp little rap of pain that

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nearly made me cry out. A pebble. Then a shower of dust and smaller stones, dislodged from somewhere above me, rattled down the cliff like a charge of small shot.

Angelos stopped dead, turned, and stared upwards straight at me.

I didn't move. I didn't think he could see me at that angle. But my mind stampeded with another and worse panic as I heard the sounds approaching the top of the cliff.

I saw Angelos stiffen, then he whipped out of sight behind a jut of rock.

The sounds came nearer. I turned my head till, by twisting my eyes in their sockets, I could see the cliff-top. If it was Simon I must shout. My mouth opened ready for the cry, and I licked the dust off my dry lips. Then something moved suddenly against the sky at the brim of the cliff, and I saw what it was.

A goat. Another. Three big black goats, yellow-eyed, flop-eared, peacefully intent on the dry scrub at the cliff's head. They turned aside at the brink of the cliff and moved slowly across above me, outlined against the deep blue of that translucent sky. As they went I thought I heard the sweet faraway stave of the goatherd's pipe. The cool pastoral sound fell through the heat like the trickle of Apollo's spring.

The relief was dizzying. The rock swam in the dazzling light I shut my eyes and put my head down beside the dusty scrub.

When I looked again, Angelos was standing in the centre of the corrie-floor. He was staring up, not at me but at the edge of the cliff above me where the goats had been. Slowly I followed his gaze. I could feel the breath of the hot stone on my cheek.

The goats were still there. They, too, were standing stock-still side by side, at the brink of the cliff. They were looking down, with ears forward and eyes intent and curious; six yellow satyrs' eyes, staring fixedly down at me, some forty feet below them.

Angelos dropped his jacket on to a boulder beside him, and started for the foot of the cliff.

At his movement I heard the flurry of pebbles as the goats fled. It echoed the quick jump and kick of my own heart. But I didn't move. Whether some instinct kept me clamped still like a hiding animal, or whether the flood of fear that washed and ebbed through my blood actually drained the power of movement from me, I can't tell.

I lay flat for the few decisive moments during which the Greek crossed the corrie and plunged up the goat-path towards me. And then it seemed that he was almost on me. I remembered the gun and lay there, unbreathing, pressed flat to the hot earth.

I had a shelter of a sort from below, and from above the overhang might partly hide me. The path sloped sharply past the end of the ledge where I lay. It was possible—it was surely possible—that he might hurry past it and never look back to see me lying there. My dress was of pale-coloured cotton, streaked with dust. Against the glaring rock he might miss me.

He was just below me now. He stopped. His head was a few

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feet below the level of my ledge. I couldn't—dared not—look, but I heard the climbing steps stilled, and then his breathing close beneath me. He was looking up. My own breath hardly stirred the dust under my mouth.

The next angle of the track would bring him upwards and past the end of the ledge where I lay. He paused where he was for a few seconds, and then I heard the soft steps moving on. But they didn't come up the track. They moved carefully away to the left, below my ledge.

Through the pathetic barrier of dead plants I could just see the top of his head. It was turned away now, and I knew that he must have left the track. I could hear loose pebbles slither and spatter down the rock, and the rustle of the dry plants he trod over. He went very carefully, with pauses almost between each step.

I had to know what he was doing. I moved my head slightly, and saw him better.

There was a ledge below mine, with a few sparse plants and a tumble of loose fragments of stone. I had noticed it in that second's wild glance round for shelter. It wouldn't have hidden anyone larger than a child. But he searched it, gun in hand, quartering it methodically like a dog.

Then he left it, and came back carefully on to the track. He paused there briefly once again, so that for a silly moment I wondered if he was satisfied, and would go away down into the corrie, thinking perhaps that the goats had been watching a snake. But he turned without further hesitation and started up the steep section that would bring him to me.

I don't even think I was frightened now. It was as if fear had been raised to such a pitch that it killed itself, like a light that goes vividly bright just before it goes out. I was back in that dimly-lit, remote theatre of unreality. This wasn't happening to me. I'm sure that nobody ever believes that a foul thing like murder can overtake them. Something will stop it. It can't happen. To others, but not to them. Not to *me*.

Angelos swiftly climbed the path. In a moment now he would reach the end of my ledge. He might see me straight away, or he might turn aside and beat the scrub till he flushed me, scared and filthy with dust, from my hiding-place. He was there now. He couldn't miss me.

I have read somewhere that when a man is hunted for his life, one of the chief dangers he undergoes is the desperate urge to give himself up and have done. I had never believed it. But it's true. It may have been that something forbade me to let the man find me crouching, dirty and frightened, at his feet; it may simply have been the terrible blind instinct of the hunted. But the compulsion came and I didn't attempt to resist it.

I stood up and began to brush the dirt off my frock.

I didn't look at him. He had stopped dead when I moved. He was standing just where my ledge left the track. To get off it I would have to pass him.

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I walked forward through the scrub and stones as if walking in my sleep. I didn't meet his eyes, but watched my feet on the rough going. He moved a little to one side and I passed him. I went slowly down the path again to the bottom of the corrie. He came just behind me.

When I got to the level ground I stumbled and nearly fell. His hand took hold of my arm from behind, and my flesh seemed to wince and shrink from the touch. I stopped.

The hand tightened; then with a jerk he pulled me round to face him. I think if he had gone on touching me I would have screamed then and there, but he let me go, so I kept silent. I knew that if I tried to scream I would be killed out of hand. But I backed away from him a step or so till a boulder touched the back of my legs. Without meaning to, I sat down; I couldn't have stood. I put both hands flat on the hot surface of the stone as if I could draw strength from it, and looked at Angelos.

He was standing perhaps five feet from me, his legs a little apart, one hand thrust negligently into the belt of his trousers, the other arm hanging loose at his side with the gun dangling.

His head was forward slightly, like a bull's when it is deciding to charge. The heavy face was terrifying with its tight curved smile, the perfect arch of the black brows and the cruel eyes that seemed to be solid, opaque black, without pupils, and without light from within. The thick nostrils were flared and he was breathing fast. The bull's-curls along his forehead were damp and tight with sweat.

He had recognised me, of course. I saw that as his slow stare raked me. He must have seen me distinctly last night in the light of the torch.

He said, " So it's my little friend of the studio, is it? " He was speaking in the quick guttural French he had used with Danielle.

I tried to say something, but no sound came. As I cleared my throat I saw the smile deepen. My voice came back. " I hope I hurt you," I said.

" That score," said Angelos very pleasantly, " will soon be quite even." My hands pressed hard on the warm stone.

He said abruptly, " Where's the Englishman? "

" I don't know."

He made a small movement towards me and I shrank back against the boulder. His expression didn't change but his voice did. " Don't be a fool. You didn't come up here alone. Where is he? "

I said hoarsely, " We were sitting up there on the cliff and we saw a man hanging about: that chap Dimitrios. He's a guide. I don't know if you know him. Simon—my friend—went off to speak to him. He—he thought it was him last night at the studio and I think—I think he wanted to find out what he'd been after."

It was so near the truth that I hoped he might be satisfied as far as Simon was concerned. But it wouldn't help me. Nothing would.

" And you've been up on the cliff all this time? "

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"I—why, no. I went over the hill a little way, and then I thought Simon might have come back, so I—"

"And you haven't been in the cave?"

"Cave?" I said.

"That's what I said. The cave."

The sun was cold. The rock was cold. I suppose that up to this very moment I had been hoping against silly hope, but now I knew for certain. I was going to die. Whatever I had seen or not seen—the mule, the cave, the treasure, Nigel, Danielle—it wouldn't help me in the least to play the innocent. None of these things mattered beside the one fact that I had seen Angelos.

He had taken two paces away to where his coat lay over the boulder. He slipped a hand in the pocket and brought out the torch. "You left this, didn't you?"

"Yes."

A gleam of surprise in the black eyes showed that he had expected me to deny it. I said flatly, "I dropped it when I saw Nigel's body. And I was in the cave just now when you killed Danielle."

The metal of the torch flashed as he made a sudden little movement. At least I had startled him into interest. If I could keep him talking—if I could keep alive for just a few more minutes—perhaps a miracle would happen.

He was a sadist; perhaps he would enjoy talking to frighten me before he killed me.

I said hoarsely, gripping the stone, "Why did you torture Nigel? Did you really mean to kill Danielle?"

It wasn't going to work. He dropped the torch on top of the coat, and gave a quick glance round the encircling cliffs. Then he put the gun down gently beside the torch, and turned to me.

I did manage to move then, but the thrust of my hands that took me off the warm stone sent me a pace towards him.

As I whirled to run he caught me from behind and pulled me back as easily as if I had been a rag doll. I suppose I fought him: I don't remember anything except blind panic and the feel of his hands and the acrid smell of his sweat, and the appalling iron strength that held me as effortlessly as a caught moth.

One hand came hard over my mouth, crushing my lips against my teeth, but the palm was slimy with sweat; it slipped, and I wrenched my head away and managed to kick him hard on the shinbone. I paid dearly for the moment of advantage: as I twisted my body in a vain attempt to break away, he half lunged forward to drag me close again and silence me, treading on a loose stone that rolled under his foot, and we fell together.

If I had fallen undermost I should probably have been badly hurt, if not stunned, for he was a heavy man; but he went down on to his side in a stumbling fall, dragging me with him. Even then the brutal grip never loosened, and as we hit the ground he moved like lightning, flinging himself over my body with a quick heave, and holding me down on the ground underneath him.

Then his grip shifted. I was on my back, and he had my left

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arm twisted up under me, so that our double weight held it there, almost breaking. My right wrist was in his grip, clamped down against the rock beside me. His free hand flashed up to my throat. The heavy body held me down; I couldn't move, but frantic now with terror I screamed and twisted uselessly under him and jerked my head from side to side, trying to avoid the hand that slipped and groped on my throat for the hold he wanted. I screamed again.

He cursed in Greek and hit me hard across the mouth; then as my head went back against the rock the hand gripped my throat at last, moved a little, tightened . . .

I was still alive. It was years later and the boiling agonised black had cleared, and I was alive. I was lying on my back in the hot dust, and above me the sky arched in a great flashing, pulsating dome of blue. Angelos' weight was on me. I could feel his heavy breathing; the smell of his sweat was rank; his hand was wet and sour and foul across my mouth; the other hand was on my throat, but it lay loosely there, and now it lifted.

He didn't move. He lay with rigid muscles, looking up and away from me towards the entrance to the corrie. Then his hand slid from my face and went down on to the rock ready to thrust him to his feet.

His hand was on my spread hair, and the tug as he put his weight on it hurt me. The tiny pain was like a spur. It pricked me back to consciousness. I stopped blinking up into the vibrating blue of the sky and managed to move my head a fraction to look where Angelos was looking.

He was staring straight into the sun. At first I could see nothing in the dazzle at the mouth of the corrie.

Then I saw him.

I knew who it was straight away, though he was only a shadow against the glare. But even so a sharp cold thrill ran up the marrow of my spine as I felt Angelos' heart jerk, once, in his body, and heard him say thickly, " Michael? "

Realisation, shock, recognition—it must have taken only a few seconds but it seemed an age.

One moment Simon was silhouetted in fractional pause against the glare; the next, Angelos had swung himself off my body and on to his feet as lightly as a dancer. He must have forgotten that his gun had been laid aside, for his hand flashed to his hip just as Simon, coming down the ramp with the speed of a ski-jumper, brought up not five yards from him in a flurry of dust and shale.

Angelos was standing right over me, hand still at hip, watching him.

Simon stopped dead where he was. I couldn't see his expression, but I could see Angelos', and fear seeped back into my blood as agonisingly as warmth after frostbite. I stirred in the dust and tried to say something, to tell Simon who and what he was, but my throat was swollen and sore, and the brilliant light swam

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round me sickeningly, and I couldn't make a sound. Angelos must have felt me move at his feet, but he took no notice. The two men watched one another, wary and slow.

I waited for Simon to rush him as he had done last night. I didn't notice then how hard he was breathing, fighting to get heart and lungs under control after his rush up the steep track towards my terrified screaming. Nor did I realise that he thought the Greek might be armed, and that I was lying where knife or gun could reach me seconds before Simon could make contact. None of this was I in any state to realise. I only knew that Simon didn't move. I remember wondering, with a sick, cold feeling, if he was afraid.

Then he took two paces forward, very slowly, and now that he was no longer between me and the sun, I saw his face. The cold feeling went, and I wasn't afraid any more. With the fear, the tenseness went out of my body, and I felt myself relax and begin to tremble. The bruises the Greek had inflicted began to hurt. I turned on my side and tried to pull myself a little farther from him. I dragged myself a foot or so away to crouch, shaking and gasping for breath, against the boulder where I had sat before.

He took no notice of me. He had dealt with me and thrown me aside, and now he was going to deal with Simon. I could be finished after that.

Simon said, "I take it you are Angelos?" His breathing was still over-fast, but his voice was level.

"The same. And you are Michael's little brother."

"The same."

Simon was moving now, very slowly, forward a pace; another. "How did you kill my brother, Angelos?"

"I broke his neck." I noticed with surprise that the Greek was giving ground. He had lowered his head in that characteristic way he had. I could see the contraction of the flat black eyes against the light. I saw him blink rapidly once or twice; he moved his head as a bull does whose horns pain him. Then he took a slow step backwards, sidling a little . . .

I thought for a moment he was trying to get Simon out of line with him and the sun, and wondered fleetingly why he should let Simon play for time like this; then suddenly, like a flash out of a black night, I knew what he was doing. I remembered the gun, lying hidden from Simon in the tumble of Angelos' dropped coat.

Somehow I moved. It was like lifting a mattress stuffed with clay to heave my body from the scuffled dust, but I rolled over, kicked myself along the ground with one convulsive jack-knifing motion like a fish, and grabbed at the dangling sleeve of the coat just as Angelos took a sudden, swift step aside and stooped for the gun.

I had the sleeve. I yanked at it with all my strength. It caught on a bit of the rock, tore, and came with a jerk. The torch flashed over like a rocket and crashed on a stone by my head. The gun flew high and wide, hit a pile of stones three yards away, and slithered out of sight. It actually struck the Greek's hand as he reached to grab it. He whirled with a curse and kicked me and

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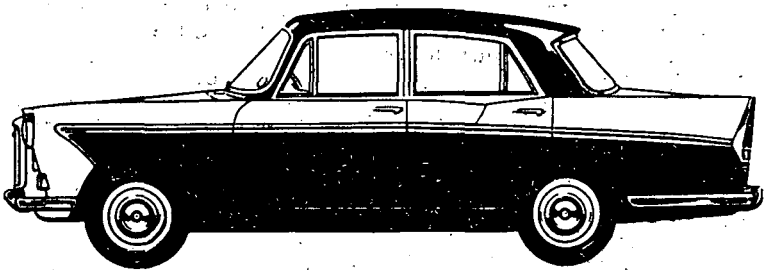

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then went down sickeningly across the boulder as Simon hit him like a steam-hammer.

Simon came in with the blow. The Greek's forearm, even as he went down over the rock, just managed to block the side-handed chop at the throat that followed it, and counter in the same movement with a wicked elbow-punch that took Simon in the lower part of the stomach. I saw pain explode through him like a bursting shell; and as he recoiled, the Greek, using the rock as a spring-board, came away from it in a lunge with all his weight behind it.

Simon's mouth disappeared in a smear of blood. His head snapped back in front of another blow that looked as if it had broken his neck, and he went down; but as he went he hooked one leg round Angelos' knee and, using the man's own momentum, brought him crashing down over him. Before the Greek hit the ground Simon had rolled aside and was above him.

I saw the Greek lash out with a foot, miss, and aim a short chopping blow with the edge of a hand at Simon's neck; Simon hit him in the throat and then the two were locked, heaving and rolling in the dust that mushroomed up round them.

I couldn't see, couldn't make out: Angelos was on his back, and Simon seemed to be across him, trying to fix the man's arm in a lock to drag it under him as Angelos had dragged mine; the Greek smashed again and again at his face; the shortened punches hadn't much force behind them but the blood was running from Simon's mouth. Then suddenly the flailing fist opened, clawed, came down on to Simon's cheekbone and slithered across it, the big spatulate thumb digging, digging, for his eye.

I had dragged myself to my feet, holding on to the boulder beside me. He couldn't do it after all; he couldn't be expected to do it. He knew how to fight, but Angelos had the weight and all those desperate years behind him. If I could help, if I could only help.

I stooped giddily and reached for a lump of rough rock, lifting it in hands that shook like leaves. I could hit him as I had last night if I could have found a weapon—perhaps the torch—

The gun.

I dropped the lump of rock and flung myself with sobbing little breaths at the pile of stones where the gun had gone. Here, surely, it had struck and slid out of sight? No sign. Then here? No. Here—oh, dear God, *here.*

There, white on the limestone, a scratch had marked its passage. I drove a shaking hand down between the jammed rocks. They scraped the skin and it hurt me but I hardly noticed. I thrust my arm down as far as I could. My fingers, stretching, touched something cold and smooth—metal. I couldn't reach it; the tips of my fingers slipped over it, no more. I could feel my lips trembling as the tears spilt salt on to them.

I lay down hard against the stones and thrust my arm farther into the narrowing crevice. The rough stone rasped the skin and I felt blood running down my wrist. My fingers slid farther, curled, gripped. I had the gun. I tried to withdraw it. But with my

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hand now curved round the butt I couldn't pull it back between the stones. I dragged at it, hopelessly, stupidly, and my hand hurt till I cried out with the pain, but I couldn't shift the gun.

Simon twisted back from that gouging thumb. The Greek lunged violently to one side as the other's hold slackened, and then somehow, was free. With a movement incredibly quick for a man of his build he had rolled aside and was bunching to jump to his feet. As he went I saw his hand close, like mine, on a cruelly jagged chunk of rock. But Simon was as quick.

The same movement that threw him back and away from the clawing hand had brought him to his feet. He saw the Greek clutch the rock. Even as the fist closed on it and the arm-muscles tightened, Simon jumped. His foot stamped down on the man's hand. The rock was undermost, and I heard the man make a dreadful sound as his hand was smashed down on to it. But he whipped over and brought his foot up with what looked like appalling force into Simon's groin. Simon saw it coming, and tried to sidestep. The foot grazed the inside of his thigh.

Simon's hand came up under the lashing ankle: I saw a heave and a twist, and the Greek crashed back on to his side like a felled ox, and Simon plummeted down on to him again in a smother of dust.

Another blow, a sick sound of flesh and bone smacking together, and then Angelos was uppermost, his fist smashing down.

I opened my hand and let the gun go. I dropped to the base of the pile of stones, and began to claw at them with those useless, shaking fingers, trying to pull the heavy stuff aside. From behind me came the thud and slither of their bodies on the ground, the torn dreadful breathing, and again the sudden sharp sound of pain. I thought it came from Simon.

The stone under my hands gave way, and I threw it down and tore at the next. And the next. And then a pile of dry earth and small jagged pebbles.

Then I saw the blue-dark gleam of the gun.

I thrust the last lump of rock aside and pushed my hand through. The muzzle was towards me. I grabbed it and dragged the thing out. I didn't even think of the danger of holding it like that. I just dragged it out between the rough stones and turned, holding it in my aspen hands. I remember thinking with surprise how heavy it was.

I'd never touched a gun before in my life. But of course it was quite easy. You pointed it and pressed the trigger: I knew that. Provided I got close enough—and if the men would only break apart for a moment and let me see through that stifling dust—Angelos would be dead, blasted out of life in a fraction of time. It didn't occur to me that this was in any way a wrong or a momentous thing to do. I took a couple of faltering steps in the direction of the struggling bodies on the ground.

It was funny, but it was difficult to walk. The ground was unsteady and the dust dragged at my feet and the gun was too

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heavy and the sky was far too bright but still I couldn't see properly.

The locked bodies on the ground moved as the man underneath made a seemingly titanic effort. Both men were covered with dust: I couldn't see who it was lying prone with one arm twisted into that cruel lock behind his back, or who it was who lay astride him, shifting his grip now, straining in some final agonising effort. If only they would break apart, if only I could see which was Angelos.

The man uppermost lay clamped over the other, one hand hard round the wrist of the locked arm, his own free arm flung round the prone man's neck in a tight embrace. As I watched, the embrace tightened still further.

The prostrate man's head came painfully back. The red dust was thick in the black curls. The broad cruel face was smeared red with it too, an archaic mask carved grimacing in red sandstone. It was Angelos who lay there in the dust, breath sobbing through the grinning lips, trying with weaker and weaker movements to throw Simon off his body.

I stood there, the gun drooping in my hand, the driving purpose snapped in me, staring like someone in a dream at the two bodies that heaved, breathing as one, on the ground at my feet.

A muscle bunched in Simon's shoulder. The Greek's head moved back another fraction. The grin was a rictus, fixed, horrible. His body gave one last desperate heave to rid itself of its killer, threshing sideways across the dusty rock. But Simon's grip didn't shift. As the two bodies, still locked, slithered a yard or so across the dusty rock to fetch up hard against the cairn where Michael had been murdered, I saw Simon's arm tense and jerk slightly back, and heard Angelos' breath tear out of his throat in a sort of whistling gasp that broke off short . . .

I knew then that Simon didn't need me or the gun. I turned aside and sat down on the boulder. I leaned back very wearily against the hot rock and shut my eyes.

After a while there was silence.

Angelos lay still, sprawled face downward against the little cairn. Simon got very slowly to his feet, and stood looking down. His face was filthy with dust and blood, lined with fatigue. I could see how his muscles slumped with weariness as he stood there. He put up the back of his hand to wipe the blood from his face. His hands were bloody, too.

Then he turned away and for the first time looked at me. He made as if to speak, and I saw his tongue come out to wet the dust-caked lips. I answered his look quickly.

"I'm all right, Simon. He—he didn't hurt me." My voice had come back, hoarse and not too steady. But there was nothing to say. I whispered, "There's a rope on the mule. It's down by the cave."

"Rope?" His voice wasn't his own either. He was coming slowly towards me. "What for?"

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"Him, of course. If he came round—"

"My dear Camilla," said Simon. And then, as he saw the look on my face, in a kind of anger, "What else did you expect me to do?"

"I don't know. Of course you had to kill him. It's just—of course you did."

His mouth twisted. It wasn't quite a smile, but nothing about him seemed, just at that moment, to be like himself. It was a stranger who stood in front of me in the blazing sunlight, with a stranger's voice, and something gone from his face that I remembered there. He stood in silence, looking down at his hands. I still remember the blood on them.

The nausea had gone, and the world steadied. I said quickly, almost desperately, out of a rush of shame, "Simon. Forgive me. I can't think straight yet. Of course you had to. It was only—coming so close to it. But you were right. There comes a time when one has to accept things like this. It was damnable of me."

He did smile then, through the weariness. "But—just exactly what were you planning to do with that?"

"With what?" I stared stupidly at the gun in my hand.

He leaned forward and took it from me gently. The blood-stained fingers avoided mine. They were shaking a little. He laid the gun carefully to one side. "I think perhaps it's safer there."

Silence.

He stood over me, looking down still with that stranger's look.

"Camilla."

I met it then.

"If you hadn't got rid of that thing," he said, "I should be dead."

"And so should I. But you came."

"My dear, of course. But if he'd got to that gun—" a tiny pause, so slight it didn't seem that what he said could be important. "Would you have shot him, Camilla?"

Quite suddenly, I was shaking uncontrollably. I said, with a sort of violence, "Yes. Yes, I would. I was just going to, but then you—you killed him yourself."

I began to cry then, helplessly. I reached out blindly with both hands and took his between them, blood and all.

He said with violence, the more shocking because it was the first time I had heard it from him, "I'll not forgive myself in a hurry for dragging you into this, by God! If I'd had any idea—"

"You didn't drag me in. I asked to be in, so I had to take what came, didn't I? It wasn't your fault it turned out as it did. A man does what he has to do, and since you *did* feel like that about Michael, you did it. That's all."

"About Michael?"

"Yes. You knew the tragedy was over, but of course once you knew Angelos was still alive—"

"My dear," said Simon, "you didn't imagine that I really killed him for Mick, did you?"

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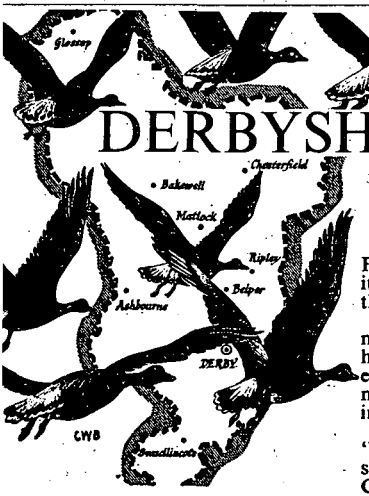

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I looked up at him rather numbly. "No? But you told Angelos—"

"I was talking the language he'd understand." He looked down at the scuffled dust between his feet. "Oh, I admit it was partly for Mick—once I found myself here facing Angelos. I felt murderous enough when I knew he was still alive, even before Dimitrios told me the rest."

"Dimitrios? Of course. He told you?"

"He was persuaded to, quite quickly. Niko turned up and helped me." A pause. "He confessed what the two of them had done to Nigel."

"Then you know." The breath I drew was three parts relief. I remembered that look in Simon's eyes, and the smooth single-mindedness of Angelos' killing. I shivered a little. "I see."

"And then," he said, "there was you."

I said nothing. My eyes were on two—no, three specks in the bright air, circling slowly high above the corrie. Simon sat beside me without moving, looking at the trampled dust. He was all at once unutterably weary. If it hadn't been for the evidence sprawled across the stones one might almost have thought that he, not Angelos, had been beaten. The words Simon had quoted that night in the studio flashed into my mind: *No man is an island, entire of itself. Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind.* I thought of Nigel, tumbled grotesquely behind the pile of dirt, and understood.

The silence drew out. Away somewhere on the mountain I thought I heard something, the clatter of stones, a breathless call. Simon didn't move. He glanced down at me.

"What happened to you? Why on earth did you come out of the cave? Surely he never found you in there in sanctuary?"

"No." I told him then all that had happened since he had left to follow Dimitrios. I remember being glad of the feel of Simon's arm round my shoulders, and of the heat of the sun.

He listened in silence, and when I had finished he still didn't speak for some minutes. Then he said, "I seem to have rather more to forgive myself for than just bringing you in on—that." For the first time his eyes went back to the cairn where the body lay. They were as I first remembered them: vivid, hard, cool.

"Quite a score," he said. "Mick, Nigel, poor silly little Danielle. And then, of course, you . . . It would almost take an Orestes, wouldn't it?" He took in his breath. "No, I doubt if the Furies, the Kindly Ones, will haunt me for this day's work, Camilla."

"No, I don't think they will."

There was a shout from the gateway behind us. With a clatter of stones, Niko—the impetuous, irrepressible Niko, old Stephanos' grandson—hurled himself into the corrie and came racing down towards us. "Beautiful miss!" he yelled. "Kyrie Simon! It's all right! I'm here!"

He slithered to a halt in front of us. His startled gaze took us

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both in—my torn and filthy dress, the bruises, my scraped wrists and hands, and Simon covered with blood and dust and the marks of battle. "Mother of God, then he *was* here? Angelos was here? He got away? He—"

He stopped abruptly as he caught sight of the body lying against the cairn. He gulped, and flashed a look at Simon. He looked at me as if he was going to speak, but he just shut his mouth again tightly and then went—it seemed reluctantly—across to where Angelos lay.

There was the sound of slower footsteps from the gateway of the corrie, and the old shepherd, Stephanos, came into sight. He paused there for a moment, just as Simon had done, then came deliberately down the ramp towards us.

Simon got stiffly to his feet. Stephanos stopped at my elbow. His eyes, too, were on Angelos. Then he looked at Simon. He didn't speak, but he nodded, slowly. Then he smiled. I think he would have spoken to me, but Niko had straightened up and now came running back. A flood of Greek was poured out at Simon, who answered, and seemed to be telling his story. I was suddenly too tired to pay any attention. I leaned back into a bar of shadow and waited. Presently Simon and Stephanos left me and went towards the cave.

Niko lingered for a moment. "You are not well, beautiful miss?" he asked anxiously. "That one—that Bulgar—he hurt you?"

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To call anyone a Bulgar is the worst term of abuse a Greek can think up. "Not really, Niko," I said. "I'm a bit shaken, that's all." I smiled at him. "You should have been here."

He turned his look of dazzled admiration on me. "I should have dealt with him, me, and not on account of my grandfather's cousin Panos, but for *you*, beautiful miss. Though Kyrie Simon," Niko added generously, "did very well, not?"

"For an Englishman," I said deprecatingly, taunting him with his first bantering distrust of Simon's prowess.

"Indeed, for an Englishman." He caught my look and grinned, unabashed. "Of course," he added, "I help him with Dimitrios Dragoumis. I, Niko."

"He told me so. What did you do with him?"

The black eyes opened wide. He looked shocked. "I could not tell you *that*. You are a lady, and—oh, I *see*." The devastating smile flashed out. "Afterwards, you mean? I take him down to the road, but not to Delphi, because I want to get back to help Kyrie Simon, you understand. There is a lorry. I explain to the men; they take him to Delphi to the police. The police will come. I shall go to meet them and guide them here. And so."

"And so." I said it very wearily. It seemed as good a period to the day as anything.

As I shut my eyes and leaned back, I heard him crossing the corrie at his usual impetuous gallop . . .

It seemed a long time before the three of them came out of the cave again into the sunlight.

Niko came first, leading the mule. He seemed subdued now, and a little pale. He didn't come over to me again, but swung himself on to the mule's back, kicked it into reluctant motion, and with a wave to me clattered out of the corrie.

Stephanos and Simon stood talking for a few minutes longer. Stephanos looked sombre. I saw him nod to something Simon said, then he gestured upwards towards the blazing arch of sky where those black specks still hung and circled. He turned and trudged slowly across to a patch of shade near the body, he sat down there and settled himself as if to wait, leaning forward with his head against the hands clasped on his staff. He shut his eyes. Stephanos looked suddenly very old—with that Homeric head and the shut eyes as old as time itself. And I remembered that it was he who had sheltered Michael, and whose own son the Germans had killed in reprisal.

It was a picture I was never to forget, that quiet tailpiece to tragedy. There was the blue arch of the brilliant sky; there the body that the Kindly Ones had hunted down and killed on the very spot where he himself had shed blood; there the old shepherd, bearded like Zeus himself, nodding in the shade. At the head of the cliffs stood the black goats, staring.

From somewhere, not too far distant now, came the little stave of music, the goatherd's pipe whose sound, drifting down through the light-well, had led me to the Apollo of the holy spring. At the

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sound the goats lifted their heads and, turning, moved off, black against the sky, an Attic frieze in slow procession.

Simon's shadow fell across me.

"Niko's gone to guide the police here. He wanted to escort you to Delphi, but I told him you wouldn't be fit for the trek quite yet. You and I have something still to do, haven't we?"

I hardly heard the question. I said, apprehensively, "The police?"

"Don't worry. There'll be no trouble for me. Apart from everything else, and God knows he's done plenty, he was trying to kill you." He smiled. "And now, are you coming? Stephanos is asleep by the looks of it, so he won't wonder where we've gone."

"You didn't tell him and Niko about the shrine?"

"No. The question of what to do about the guns and gold is out of our hands now, thank heaven, but the Apollo—that question's our own to answer. Do you know the answer?"

I looked at him inquiringly; perhaps a little doubtfully.

Then he nodded, and I said slowly, "I suppose so."

He smiled and put down a hand to me.

We went into the cave in silence. Simon's torch was almost dead, but it showed the way. It was not strong enough to probe too far into the shadows. He paused just inside the entrance, and I saw him step aside and stoop over something that lay near the pile of rubble where the boxes had been. He straightened up with one of Angelos' crowbars in his hand. I didn't look farther, but followed the mercifully dimming light through the pillared vaults until the slab barred the way.

The light paused on the old marks of tooling in the stone. "There," said Simon softly. "It should slide back easily enough. Even another three or four inches will block the entrance. I'll leave this here for the moment."

He laid the crowbar down and we went through the cleft for the last time, and up the curving tunnel that led to the bright citadel.

Apollo had stood there without move or change for more than two thousand years: now, it seemed a miracle that in the last hour he had remained untouched, unaltered. The sun had slid farther towards the west and the light fell more slantingly through the leaves; that was all.

We knelt at his feet and drank. I cupped my hands under the spring and splashed the water over my face and neck, then held my wrists under the icy runnel. It stung on the bruises and the scraped flesh of my wrists, a sharp remedial stinging that seemed to signal my body's return from whatever numb borderlands of shock I had been straying in. I sat back, flicking the cool drops off my hands.

Simon was leaning forward, putting something on the stone plinth at the statue's feet. There was the gleam of gold.

He caught my look, and smiled. "I vowed it, remember?"

"I remember."

"It comes to me that you made a vow, too, in this very shrine."

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"So I did. I'll have to share your coin, Simon. I've nothing here to give."

"Then we'll share," he said. That was all, in that casual easy voice with no change in it; but I turned quickly to look up at him.

The vivid grey eyes held mine for a moment, then I turned from him almost at random and picked up Nigel's little water-pot. "We'll leave this here, too, shall we?"

Something glinted deep in the grass down beside the edge of the stone plinth. I smoothed the long stems aside and picked it up. It was another gold coin.

"Simon, look at this!"

"What is it? A talent? Don't tell me Apollo's provided a ram in the thicket for—" He stopped short as I held my hand out towards him.

I said, "It's a sovereign. That means Nigel did find the gold as well as the statue of Apollo. He must have left this here."

"Must he?"

"Well, who else—?" Then I saw Simon's face and stopped.

He nodded. "Yes. Of course. Michael made an offering, too."

Simon took it from me gently and laid it beside the water-pot at the feet of the god.

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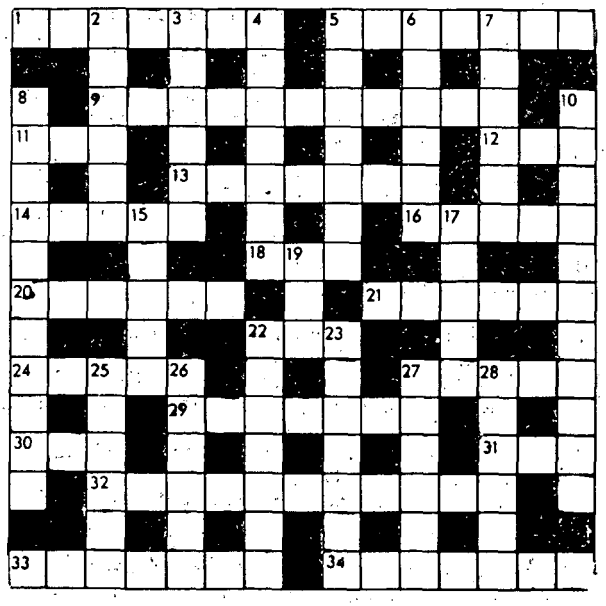
Solution on Page 33

★



CLUES

Across

1 Survey in tin spectacles (7).

5 Skyborne, but not St. Nick's chariot! (7).

9 Turn in, stoic, teaching upsets you (11).

11 Teachers' union's one to crack (3).

12 Chop St. Mary, for instance? (3).

13 Unlike 11! (4, 3).

14 Poe brought this house down (5).

16 A penny last is dismal (5).

18 He's often dear (3).

20 Time for a relish (6).

21 Titania's base lover (6).

22 "Journeys —— in lovers' meeting" (Shakespeare) (3).

24 Ho by measure out hunting (5).

27 The answer's melon purée (5).

29 Enliven and end like chess (7).

30 Sown by a rake? (3).

31 Wound o'er, according to Gray (3).

32 Such waters sound paradoxical (11).

33 Defeatist gesture with sponge (5, 2).

34 Given to resembling actor? (7).

Down

2 Sew—the saint's tickled (6).

3 East by annual festival (6).

4 We're in what go with cuts (7).

5 Help! The cricket club's in there! (7).

6 So we stand (6).

7 No French age—youth! (6).

8 Spanish form of quiz? (11).

10 Confound tired lament, it's harmful (11).

15 Artistic prop as in eel (5).

17 "Bring the —— primrose that forsaken dies" (Milton) (5).

19 Austrian river in pub (3).

22 Tied on I become published work (7).

23 A gem of a lozenge (7).

25 Keep this carriage off the streets (6).

26 Milfoil in Scotland? (6).

27 Diabolical name for foreign army (6).

28 For croquet start with backhand lam (6).

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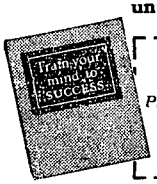

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